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Beauty and the Butch: The Lesbian Interpreter

By

Stephanie K. Ehrlich

A thesis submitted to Western Oregon University

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

March 2020

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As much as I want to say, “I made it! I did it!” I can’t take all of the credit. Instead I will say WE MADE IT and WE DID IT! I will forever be grateful for those who have helped me along the way.

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ABSTRACT

Beauty and the Butch: The Lesbian Interpreter

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The purpose for this project is to collect data from American Sign Language Interpreters who identify as lesbian, specifically targeting their experiences “coming out” to consumers while at work. Research about coming out/self-disclosure at work is a relatively new field of study. Most of what has been studied was about coming out to family and friends and the stages of self-disclosure. There is also limited research about the lesbian appearance and the recent shift in the androgynous-appearing lesbian. Times have changed, and there are no longer just femme and butch lesbians. Elizabeth Donovan has been the only researcher to study LGBTQ+ American Sign Language Interpreters. This study, however, focuses solely on lesbians only. This study explores how lesbian interpreters’ experiences vary when coming out to consumers, but appearance seems to be a common theme in the data collected for this study. From the onset of the study, analysis was done to see if there was a link between gender expression and sexual

identity. This was done by examining clothing and appearance and seeing if there was an impact on stress levels at work. Szymanski (2005) found that awareness of LGBTQ experiences of distress was important because of the negative impact it has on mental health. The results of this study suggest that further research related to interpreters coming out at work is warranted. This research can serve as a springboard for further research in the LGBTQ community.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Upon entering the Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies at WOU, I did not have any thoughts about a thesis topic whatsoever. As I explored topics, I read Jones's (2017) thesis, *Perception in American Sign Language Interpreted Interactions: Gender Bias and Consumer Orientation*. One of her recommendations of further research was on gender bias and orientation. After running several ideas by my instructors, I finally decided to narrow down my topic to my own culture.

I began playing around with the idea of studying a variety of appearances of lesbians and the perceptions that go along with them. I wanted to know how the perceptions of the femme¹ interpreter varied from the perceptions of the masculine interpreter. After much reading, my own work experiences, and self-analysis, I was finally able to narrow down my topic even further. I settled on collecting coming out stories of lesbian interpreters. I wanted to know things like who was "coming out," who was staying in the closet and not disclosing, why they were or were not "coming out," whether appearance was a factor, and what were the emotions that surrounded this process.

Throughout this research process, I have learned, changed, and become a better member of the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) community. It has changed my perspectives and some of my life goals and intentions. I have become a

¹ A lesbian who is notably or stereotypically feminine in appearance and manner.

better Ally² and interpreter because of this research. This research has touched my life in ways I never could have dreamed. I've been angered, I have been frustrated, and I have been saddened to the point of tears. I never wanted this research to end because there is so much to be done and learned.

When I first solicited responses for my survey, I was astonished at how quickly it was shared, how many participants responded, and how many personal messages I received. Others saw the importance in my work, and they wanted to be a part of it too. I was blown away at how many people were upset with me because I only wanted lesbians. Specifically, people who identified as Queer³ were not happy with being excluded. I felt saddened and hurt for them too, but I knew I needed to focus on one group of people. I needed to focus on what I knew, or at least what I thought I knew: lesbians.

Purpose and Theoretical Framework

The purpose for this research was to record a snapshot of the lives and experiences of lesbian interpreters at work using a phenomenological framework. As Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio (2019) stated, "Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world" (p. 90). This study recruited lesbian interpreters in order to collect specific phenomena through their life experiences and to explore their identity by using qualitative and quantitative methods. While we as a people have the ability to learn from others' experiences, we often do not take the opportunity.

² "Often now used specifically of a person who is not a member of a marginalized or mistreated group but who expresses or gives support to that group" ("Ally," n.d.).

³ "Of, relating to, or characterized by sexual or romantic attraction to members of one's own sex: HOMOSEXUAL, GAY" ("Queer," n.d.).

Hannah Gadsby, in their Netflix stand-up special mentions this concept of learning from the lives of others. They said, “Ironically, I believe Picasso was right. I believe we could paint a better world if we learned to see it from all perspectives, as many perspectives as we possibly could. Because diversity is strength. Difference is a teacher. Fear difference, you learn nothing” (Olb & Parry, 2018). My hope is that through this study, readers will learn from the life experiences of these lesbian interpreters and understand the impact of their identity as a member of the LGBTQ community on their work. But most of all, I hope that those interpreters who also identify as a lesbian will understand how their identity plays a role in their work as a professional.

It is important to note that Dean and Pollard (2011) found that interpreting requires a fast response to an on-the-spot problem or dilemma. Because of the stress that the quick decision making caused, the tool of demand-control schema was developed. Dean and Pollard proposed this tool to help interpreters develop decision-making skills and to create a positive environment for those on-the-spot decisions. Hardwood (2017) found that

As an ASL/English interpreter experiences professional identity development in the face of a variety of situations that require on-the-spot decisions, it is, therefore, more evident that the interpreter needs to possess a clear self-concept, and ultimately, a clear professional identity. The literature emphasizes that “interpreters have to ‘act’ as other parties, often dealing with complex content in stressful circumstances – they need a great deal of resilience and confidence to maintain their sense of self in such an occupation” (Bontempo et al., 2014, p. 34).

Without a stable sense of self, an individual may struggle to face the everyday challenges of the vocation and may further struggle to develop their professional identity. (Bontempo et al., 2014 as cited in Hardwood, 2017, p. 18)

The lesbian interpreter then has an added challenge at times, especially if they do not have a clear self-identity when it comes to their LGBTQ identity. Schwartz et al. (2011) found that “when one becomes ‘stuck’ in the daily process of developing a sense of identity—especially when one is not willing or able to stop thinking about what choices to make—large fluctuations in reconsideration may occur, and negative outcomes may result” (p. 381). These interpreters have to develop and have a clear sense of personal identity, LGBTQ identity, and a professional identity as an interpreter. At times, all three identities may play a part in their everyday lives and in their occupation.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There has only been one study about LGBTQ interpreters, but none specifically about interpreters that identify as lesbian. Because of this, the literature review will focus on the wider LGBTQ community with a focus on lesbians. Elizabeth A. Donovan (2019) wrote her thesis, *Exploring the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Sign Language Interpreters Working in the Video Relay Service Setting*. By studying the LGBTQ population and lesbians (who are not interpreters), I will later apply the research to lesbian interpreters. Lesbians are a stigmatized population, and a variety of stereotypes and labels will be examined, along with coping strategies.

The next section in the literature review will be a discussion of the history of the lesbian appearance. It is important to explore history because it helps describes the current situation. The section on *The Lesbian Look* will cover several studies about appearance and how it impacts identity of lesbians.

Finally, I will explore disclosure and the coming out process. “The closet” is in reference to people who are gay but have not yet disclosed that information to others. Being out of the closet lies on a continuum, according to Croteau (1996). One can be out of the closet with friends and family and in the closet in their professional life. They might be out with themselves and other LGBTQ people but still in the closet with everyone else. They might still be using strategies to pass as heterosexual with some and others might affirm their lesbian identity. “Coming out is not a process to be completed, but a career to be managed” (Guittar & Rayburn, 2015, p. 336).

The Cass Model will be covered because it is a widely used model to discuss the coming out process. I will also review literature related to stress, another significant topic when coming out. Donovan (2019) found that the “uncertainty of how the disclosure process will play out keeps many interpreters in the video relay service setting from sharing their LGBTQ identities with consumers” (p. 68). And lastly, coming out as a career will explore the repeating cycle of coming out and how there is no definitive end.

Social Stigma Theory

In 1963, Erving Goffman published *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. This publication was significant to the field sociology and several others. Goffman stated that the term stigma originated from the Greeks who would burn marks into a person’s skin for identification purposes. These burns indicated to others that they should be avoided.

“For the stigmatized, a visible marker or stigma invokes a negative stereotype and a rationale is constructed for devaluing, rejecting, and excluding them” (Dozier, 2017, p. 198). Stigmatization is used to keep down those with less power as it is assumed to lead to conformity to fit in with the group norms. In order to conform, one might choose to “pass” and hide their stigma and appear to be “normal.” Passing is defined as “posing a heterosexual image to the heterosexual world, while selectively disclosing sexual orientation to other lesbians and gay men who the individual believes will keep a secret” (Jordan & Deluty, 1998, p. 43).

Those who face stigma will sometimes experience self-stigma. Self-stigma is when the individual believes or internalizes the negative beliefs about them. Those who try to “pass” experience fear of being discovered and outed. These individuals also could

experience other negative feelings of “depression, anxiety, isolation, reduced social network, and limited social support” (Pryor, 2016, p. 3). Pryor concluded that even 50 years after Goffman’s work was published, there were still significant issues of stigma, which suggested that research related to stigma should be a priority.

Social Stigmas and Stereotypes

Research has shown that women (heterosexual and homosexual) who have a masculine appearance face social stigmas in the workplace. Those women who have a masculine appearance and are lesbian can experience this stigma two-fold. Martin (2003) stated:

While theorists describe sexual orientation as a concealable stigma (Goffman, 1963), masculine women display visible markers associated with sexual orientation stereotypes, meaning they must engage different strategies to manage their stigmatized identity. In addition, their gender nonconformity not only signals a marginalized sexual orientation but also makes visible their noncompliance with societal norms and rules that maintain the gender hierarchy. (as cited in Dozier 2017, p. 197)

Ashmore and Del Boca (1981) suggested that stereotypes are “a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people” (p. 16) with gender stereotypes being defined accordingly as the “structured set of beliefs about personal attributes of men and women” (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979, as cited in Six & Eckes, 1991, p. 58).

Homosexuals were once referred to as “sexual deviants” and were labeled as “the third most dangerous group of individuals in the United States” (Aguero, Bloch, & Byrne, 1984 as cited in Viss & Burn, 1991, p. 170). These dangerous homosexual deviants were

also viewed as having a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association until 1973. How did lesbians view themselves, if this was how the United States and the psychiatric field viewed them?

In 1991, *The Divergent Perceptions of Lesbians: A Comparison of Lesbian Self-Perceptions and Heterosexual Perceptions*, by Denise C. Viss and Shawn M. Burn, stated that the stereotypes that lesbians had for themselves were different than those of heterosexuals. One study found that lesbians tended to use adjectives such as “capable, intelligent, sensitive, understanding, reliable, humorous, and interests wide” (Viss & Burn, 1991, p. 172) to describe their own perceptions and those of other homosexuals. When heterosexuals were asked to rate the adjectives, 21 adjectives were used by more than 50% of the people questioned: “attractive, religious, insecure, ambitious, aggressive, emotional, open-minded, confused, loving, masculine, perverted, submissive, mentally healthy, stable, abnormal, conservative, frustrated, unconventional, individualistic, popular, and sophisticated” (Viss & Burn, 1991, p. 173).

Geiger, Harwood, and Hummert (2006) also studied stereotypes of lesbians and showed a shift in perceptions of lesbians. College students participated in a task, and from that task, eight types of lesbian representations were described. These eight types were lipstick lesbian, career-oriented feminist, sexually deviant, soft butch⁴, free-spirit, hypersexual, sexually confused, and angry butch. These categories/types were then broken down into subtypes. There were four positive subtypes and four negative

⁴ Notably or deliberately masculine in appearance or manner (“Butch,” n.d.)

subtypes. The positive subtypes were lipstick lesbian, career-oriented feminist, soft-but, and free spirit. As Geiger et al. (2006) explained:

This stereotype is associated with very feminine qualities such as beauty, sensitivity, and maternal instinct. The *career-oriented feminist* lesbian incorporated 24 traits, was the broadest of all subtypes. This is a woman who was a proud, successful professional with a strong sense of self, open-minded, and creative. Three traits were associated with the *soft-but* lesbian. This subtype was of an athletic, powerful feminist, but not one who is explicitly masculine (cf. the *angry but* stereotype below). Finally, the *free spirit* (six traits), was characterized as an eccentric and a mysterious person who is a nonconformist. (p. 171)

Those who perceived lesbians negatively used subtypes such as: hypersexual, sexually confused, sexually deviant, and angry but. The *hyperlesbian* was

characterized as a woman who enjoys having sex with a variety of people, including both men and women. The *sexually confused* lesbian had a base of six traits, and suggested a woman who is “closeted,” confused, and uncomfortable regarding her orientation. The *sexually deviant*...immoral or mentally ill who chooses to have the “wrong” type of sex. This appeared to be the most negative subtype ... finally the *angry but* lesbian ... characterized an angry, dominating, defensive, and humorless person, who was also seen as being masculine and unattractive in appearance (i.e., stocky, muscular, and/or overweight). (Geiger et al., 2006, p. 175)

This article clearly stated that there has been more exposure to lesbians within society, but the research is still limited and “what does exist, suggests that attitudes are overwhelmingly negative (Herek, 1988, 1991 as cited in Geiger et al., 2006 p. 166). One could hope that these negative perceptions would have decreased with the recent increase of LGBTQ exposure. There are now LGBTQ characters on TV, famous TV personnel coming out publicly, as well as athletes coming out and many other forms of exposure of those that are a part of the Queer community. With this recent exposure of LGBTQ people, came an increase of confidence in the younger generations. As Mehra and Braquet (2011) suggested:

One of the miracles of the contemporary age is that in spite of the pervading conservative and homophobic trends in the cultural environment, LGBTQ individuals are coming out up to ten years earlier than 30 years ago with approximately 5-6 percent adolescents in grades 7-12 identifying as LGBTQ. (p. 403)

However, TV shows that have LGBTQ characters are not always showing the truth about coming out and the struggles that can be presented during that process.

Gender Labels

Often times, people use the terms “sex” and “gender” synonymously. However, for the purpose of this study, I will use the description proposed by Deaux (1985) in her *Annual Review* article: “‘Sex’ refers to the biologically based categories of male and female, and ‘gender’ refers to the psychological features frequently associated with these biological states” (as cited in Six & Eckes, 1991, p. 57).

“Lesbian gender labels (e.g. butch, soft butch, butch/femme, femme, high femme) have been traditionally understood through the mannerisms, behaviors, and clothing styles that lesbians embrace” (Singh, Vidaurri, Zambarano, & Dabbs, 1999, as cited in Walker, Golub, Bimbi & Parsons, 2012, p. 91). When it comes to gender labels there is a continuum of masculine and feminine traits. These traits can consist of hairstyle, clothing style, and mannerisms. However, this spectrum isn’t limited to appearance or expression. According to Levitt and Hiestand (2005), gender labels also include social interactions with other lesbians.

The lesbian spectrum typically ranges from femme to butch. Femme refers to feminine, and butch refers to masculine. Within this spectrum, there are a range of lesbian labels. One example is “soft butch,” which could be a lesbian who falls on the masculine side of the spectrum yet presents some feminine qualities. The “butch/femme” would be a label that would fall in the middle of the spectrum. This spectrum is not one-size-fits-all, because gender is fluid. Throughout the years, heteronormativity⁵ has led to the thought process of masculine equals to male and femininity equates to females. Just because a lesbian presents as masculine through their hair, clothing, or mannerisms does not mean that they present that way in all situations (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004).

Levitt, Gerrish, and Hiestand (2003) found that lesbians were not comfortable with or not relatable to the stereotypes that went with their label. While the term femme does not take on a negative connotation, it still causes discomfort for those lesbians. Femme is seen as “not butch” and/or “not the typical lesbian.” Often butch lesbians felt

⁵ Based on the attitude that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality (“Heteronormativity,” n.d.)

that others expected them “to be tough, to be a leader, to take care of and protect others, not to cry, not to date other butches, to be sexually dominant, and to take care of chores designated as men’s responsibilities” (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004, as cited in Walker et al., 2012, p. 92).

History of the Lesbian Appearance

Much like any other dominant culture, lesbians have had their own appearance norms that have shifted over time. This can be seen in Rothblum’s work (1994). She studied lesbian appearance and other norms within the community. Appearance norms have an important role in the lesbian culture just as with any other marginalized or stigmatized identity. Being able to distinguish one’s self from the outsiders can be key in building an identity. “Appearance is used to communicate messages about sexuality that can be ‘read’ by either the world at large or by others ‘in the know’⁶ (Rothblum, 1994 as cited in Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2013, p. 207).

Cogan and Erickson (1991) stated, “In a review of U.S. lesbian history and culture in the 20th century, Faderman (1991) found appearance to be an important part of lesbian life. She notes that in the 1920s, being lesbian became chic among bohemian women” (p. 18). Shortly thereafter, lesbians were able to wear pants without criticism, because women were now working in the factories.

The 1950s was the butch/femme era. Appearance was a distinct trait for this time. Femmes were following feminine norms, while the butch lesbians cut their hair short and

⁶ “If you are *in the know* about something, especially something that is not known about or understood by many people, you have information about it” (“In the know,” n.d.).

wore men's clothing. The 1950s were a time for lesbian bar raidings and beatings, which lead to a stricter dress code among lesbians. As Cogan and Erickon (1999) described:

Among poor and working-class lesbians, butch/femme identity became a rigidly enforced code. Lesbians who were not clearly butch or femme were termed kiki and were unwelcome in places lesbians gathered. At least part of this rigidity had to do with fear. If a woman in a bar was not clearly butch or femme, other lesbians would be afraid to approach her lest she turned out to be a policewoman who did not "know how to dress." (p. 18)

According to Faderman (1991), it was not until the 1970s that the androgynous⁷ appearance became an acceptable lesbian appearance. While heterosexual women were dressing themselves to please men, lesbian women instead were dressing for comfort. This was also a time for breaking the mold and for stepping away from oppressive norms. During this time, lesbians were rejecting the notion that in a relationship there would be one butch and one femme. According to Loulan (1990),

The 1970s feminist movement, flannel shirts, blue jeans, work boots, an absence of jewelry or makeup, and short hair became de rigueur. Among lesbians, this norm was as rigidly enforced as the butch/femme code had been enforced in the years prior. Loulan describes how butch/femme lesbians of this time period were ostracized for aping heterosexual styles, and how this attitude persists in lesbian communities today. (As cited in Cogan & Erickson, 1999, p. 18)

The 1980s and 1990s brought diversity among lesbians, according to Rothblum (1994). Over these years, the lesbian culture was becoming more visible to the

⁷ Presenting with both male and female characteristics ("Androgynous," n.d.).

heterosexual culture. With change and visibility, came less strict lesbian norms. One was not held to the same lesbian standards when it came down to appearance and mannerisms.

In 1999, Cogan and Erickson found that the butch and femme women complained that they struggled with membership in the larger lesbian community. They felt that they were excluded from the androgynous lesbian crowd. As Cogan and Erickson (1999) stated, “A woman who identified as femme told us: Femmes are not accepted because they’re treated as if they are trying to pass as straight. [They] lose the support, the contact that may occur” (p. 24). While research tends to suggest that lesbians have often focused on their appearance in order to be identifiable, researchers are still unsure if that continues after they have come out.

The Look of the Lesbian

The look of the lesbian has been of importance and mentioned in literature for several decades. A lesbian’s appearance helps others (whether “in the know” or not) to make a conclusion about their sexual orientation, identity, and/or preferences (Cole, 2000; Faderman, 1991, as cited in Clarke, 2013, p. 1). *Resisting and Conforming to the ‘Lesbian Look’: The Importance of Appearance Norms for Lesbian and Bisexual Women* (Huxley et al., 2013) explored how appearance is a part of a lesbian’s identity and how its importance has changed over the years. They suggested: “LGB appearance researchers have argued that there has been a mainstreaming and diversification of lesbian style in the last couple of decades, which has resulted in less distinction between lesbian and straight looks” (Huxley et al., 2013, p. 205).

Again, the lesbian appearance serves two vital roles within the community. The first is to be identified and to identify other lesbians. The second is to demonstrate group membership to the lesbian community. According to Krakauer and Rose (2002), lesbians who have come out recently must find a way to show their membership to the culture. Often, this leads to a change of appearance during the coming out process.

There are several ways in which a newly out lesbian might change their appearance. The most recognizable change is when they adopt masculine garments, wear their hair short, or wear another item that is seen as masculine. Some of these changes are permanent and others are temporary. Reddy-Best and Pedersen's (2015) research bears this out: "Fourteen of the 18 women who changed their dress or appearance after they were out began dressing more masculine once they readily shared their sexual identity with others because they felt it symbolized their queer identity" (p. 59). Another way to signify queer cultural membership is to wear obvious LGBTQ Pride attire. This might consist of rainbow apparel, pins, or t-shirts with LGBTQ slogans. Reddy-Best & Pederson (2015), also interviewed 20 women and

Eighteen participants indicated that they changed their dress or appearance after they were out because they wanted to be more visibly queer to the queer community. The other two participants explained that they did not change their dress after they were out. (p. 58)

It is important to remember that each coming out story is different, which also leads to a difference in appearance changes. Reddy-Best and Pederson found that of those who changed their appearance, 13 made an immediate change and 5 changed gradually.

Sixteen of the 18 women who changed appearance kept up that change long term, and 2 of the 18 women reverted back to their old styles.

One survey (Cogan & Erickson, 1999), from *Lesbians, Levis, and Lipstick: The Meaning of Beauty in Our Lives*, discussed the topic of appearance in regard to how lesbians changed their appearance after coming out. They found that 36% cut their hair, 22% would dress more comfortably, 20% gave up traditional beauty rituals (shaving, wearing make-up, dresses and high heels), 16% wore something to make self-identifiable as a lesbian, 11% got a tattoo or piercing, 9% went from dressing for others to dressing for themselves, 9% appeared more femme, and 7% more appeared more butch (Cogan & Erickson, 1999).

Butch lesbians stereotypically have not followed the heterosexual female norms when it comes to appearance. They tend to take on a masculine look by wearing men's clothing and wearing a short hair style. Huxley et al. (2013) concluded:

McLean (2008) argued that there has been a consolidation of the lesbian identity around the butch image, so that the terms 'butch' and lesbian have become synonymous. This has led to the privileging of butch women's experiences over those of non-butch women are 'authentic' or 'real' lesbians." (p. 206)

Huxley et al. (2013) continued: "Feminine appearing lesbian and bisexual women have described how their sexual identity and their right to access LGB space have been questioned (p. 207). Heterosexuals tend to stereotype femmes as sexually confused and say things like "you just haven't found the right guy," because they don't appear like a "real lesbian." While femme lesbians are feeling like they have to prove that they are homosexual, the butch women are dealing with the social stigma because they are easily

recognizable as a lesbian. Huxley et al. concluded that “the threat of access being denied creates pressure on such women to conform and visibly demonstrate their identity” (p. 214).

Huxley et al. (2013) also described “The ‘L’ Look,” discussing appearance and how hair styles were important to being identified as lesbian. In one study from this section, participants stated that hair was the most important indicator of a woman’s sexual orientation. Short hair has been associated with lesbianism (Huxley et al., 2013). It does not come as a surprise to find that many women choose to cut their hair after coming out, stating, for example, “I’ve chosen to cut my hair because it makes me look more androgynous ... I’ve noticed more women look at me now” (Huxley et al., 2013, p. 213). After coming out, cutting their hair, and eventually becoming confident and comfortable with their identity as a lesbian, some women then grow their hair back out. One of Huxley et al.’s (2013) participants “described the moment when she realized that she was comfortable enough with her identity that she did not have to stringently conform to the lesbian hair norms” (p. 216).

Lesbians in the Workplace

Lesbians encounter stereotypes and stigmas for not only their sexual orientation but for being a female in the workplace. Gender and appearance norms in the workplace have been examined throughout the years. Women, in general, are held to different standards than men. Women are held accountable for norms that include, but not limited to clothing style, weight and shape, makeup, and hair (Chapkis, 1986; Gimlin, 1996; Weitz, 2001).

According to Dellinger and Williams (1997), makeup plays a large role for women at work. The women who tend to wear makeup are seen as healthy-appearing. However, the day they show up to work without makeup, they might be questioned about an illness or lack of sleep. Then, the women who show up to work with makeup on who normally do not wear it are typically given compliments or other forms of positive attention. Makeup in the workplace leads to thoughts and feelings of credibility and professionalism.

Similarly, hairstyles played an important role for women much like makeup did. Weitz (2001) found that heterosexual women would sometimes cut their hair to appear more mature and professional. However, the lesbians who were trying to pass as heterosexual would keep their hair long to help with that effort. Hair seemed to play a part in Donovan's work in 2019. Donovan found that 26% of LGBTQ participants believed that their appearance was related to the negativity from consumers that they experience. Donovan (2019) described this:

As just one example, participants who identified as female, but who had short or masculine haircuts, were frequently challenged with comments such as: "You should have long hair if you are a girl!"; or, "If you are a woman, why do you have short hair?"; or "Why do you have short hair? You look like a man. If you had longer hair, I wouldn't be confused." Another survey participant reported, "Being an LGBT interpreter in the [video relay service] community is tricky sometimes, especially [because] of my appearance. It got to a point where I started growing my hair a bit [because] I was sick of answering questions."

Women also receive negative feedback from consumers when they are not wearing enough make-up. (p. 61)

Research has shown that lesbians and other LGBTQ people experience heterosexism at work. “According to Herek (1992) heterosexism is defined as ‘an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community’” (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015, p. 56). Experiencing heterosexism at work leads to a negative job performance (Reddy-Best, 2018), stress, depression (Reddy-Best, 2018), and an increased risk of suicide or suicide attempts (Johnson, Faulkner, Jones, & Welsh, 2007; Reddy-Best, 2018).

In order to avoid stigmatization, some lesbians will conform their appearance in order to be able to pass as heterosexual. Passing can be an exhausting task regardless of how long they have been hiding their identity. In order to pass as heterosexual, a lesbian must conform to traditional feminine ways. This consists of language used, appearance, and behavior. Donovan’s (2019) research found that some LGBTQ interpreters who could pass as heterosexual felt the need to use strategies to keep their LGBTQ identity hidden throughout the interaction with a consumer.

Reddy-Best and Pedersen (2015) conducted research that resulted in eight of 16 women conforming their appearance at their place of work. This led to feelings of discomfort for those eight women. As one of their participants, Debbie, said, “I know that I’m supposed to act a certain way at work, I definitely know what they want of me, and I dress to fit that. I definitely wear more feminine clothing” (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015, p. 60). Having said that, Bowring and Brewis (2009) concluded that it

seemed the lesbians who dressed less feminine and more masculine (“butch”) experienced fewer problems at work.

Coming out at work is different than coming out with friends and family. Disclosure at work seems to be less planned due to colleagues’ thoughts, comments, and questions. This might happen by a coworker simply asking about weekend’s events, who they are bringing to a company party, and many other scenarios.

Disclosure at work is a complicated and multifaceted task. In the end, it comes down to a personal choice by completing a cost/benefit analysis of the possible repercussions of coming out. Donovan (2019) found that many interpreters did not come out because the implications are unpredictable. She also found that the interpreters would use past experiences to influence the decision about disclosing or not. This cost/benefit analysis consists of two major factors: “the relationship with co-workers (Button, 2004; Griffith & Hebl, 2002) and how supportive the organizational environment may be” (Einarsdottir, Hoel, & Lewis, 2016, p. 491).

Colgan et al. (2008) said that in some cases people are being “outed” by their coworkers (as cited in Einarsdottir et al., 2016, p. 491). For example: Employee A comes out to B. After that happens, A no longer has control of that information, and B could pass around A’s sexuality to other coworkers. This passing of sexual orientation information could be done directly or indirectly. These kinds of experiences can then shape the next time a situation is presented in which A could potentially “come out.”

Gender identity and gender expression protections have become a hot topic in the workplace over the last 10-15 years. Munsch and Hirsh (2010) defined “gender identity” as the “internal sense of one’s gendered self (e.g., girl, boy, woman, man, androgynous

person)” (p. 153). “Gender” and “gender expression,” on the other hand, refer to external characteristics and behaviors associated with men and women (e.g., behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice). Knowlton (2010) stated, “In early January 2010, the Obama administration added language to the federal jobs website explicitly banning discrimination based on gender identity” (p. 152). While federal jobs have protections encompassing gender identity, it is not like that for all public positions. Anti-discrimination policies are being slowly integrated into the public workplace.

Donovan (2019) found that the amount of support by the company had an impact on the interpreter’s interaction with consumers. Donovan also concluded that “a lack of support can make it extra challenging for LGBTQ interpreters to navigate the workplace. Alternatively, working for a supportive company can allow an LGBTQ interpreter to feel better equipped to handle the sometimes-unpredictable interactions with consumers” (p. 81).

The Cass Model

Coming out for anyone is a process, and that process is unique for each individual. There are still a few stages and/or phases a person might go through when making their way out of the closet. There are several models out there that explore and explain the coming out process, but the one most commonly used is the Cass Model. This model is often used by those who work in the LGBTQ community, such as doctors, social workers, therapists, and counselors.

It is often thought that the coming out process is a linear process with a distinct beginning and end. Recent research has shown that this is not the case; it is a multifaceted and gradual process (Guittar & Rayburn, 2015). According to the Cass

Model, there are six stages of coming out. It is important to note that there are also two processes that a lesbian will go through in order to come out. According to Cass (1979), these parallel processes are: “the internal development of self-definition (called identity development), and the external development of behaviors and attitudes congruent with internal identity (called the coming out process)” (as cited in Jordan & Deluty, 1998, p. 42). The stages of the Cass Model include:

1. Identity Confusion—beginning awareness in regard to lesbian feelings and behavior
2. Identity Comparison—individual has the thought “I think I might be lesbian” and feelings of not belonging
3. Identity Tolerance—individual defines themselves as “probably lesbian”
4. Identity Acceptance—individual accepts that they are a lesbian
5. Identity Pride—individual immerses themselves in the LGBTQ community and develops a sense of pride of being a member of the LGBTQ community
6. Identity Synthesis—being lesbian becomes a part of their self-identity.

Stress

Being a lesbian can be stressful. In their comedy show featured on Netflix, Hannah Gadsby said, “I’ve been mastering the art of tension since childhood. I didn’t have to invent the tension. I was the tension. I’m tired of tension. Tension is making me sick” (Olb & Parry, 2018). As Goffman (1963) indicated, “Stigma refers to an identity mark that discredits an individual or causes them to be undesirable or rejected” (p. 4). The lesbian community experiences stigmatization that leads to stress.

Gillow and Davis (1987) found that the most prevalent cause of stress was fear of their sexual orientation being exposed. A lesbian being outed or exposed at work can cause serious repercussions. They could be faced with violence, harassment, discrimination, and potential job loss or demotion. If those are the potential outcomes, then why would anyone ever disclose their sexuality at work? If a person chooses not to disclose, they are more likely to experience adverse psychological effects. “Those who remain closeted report lower levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction, (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Lane & Wegner, 1995; Savin-Williams & Rodriguez, 1993), increased health risks (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, & Visscher, 1996; Kalichman & Nachimson, 1999), and extensive and energy-draining activities focused on covering up their stigmatized identity” (Ellis & Riggle, 1996, as cited in Griffith & Hebl, 2002, p. 1191). In an effort to hide their identities, Ellis and Riggle (1996) reported that strategies would be used. These strategies included giving false information, use of neutral pronouns, and flat out avoidance (as cited in Griffith & Hebl, 2002, p. 1193).

The Homosexual Career

Being a lesbian can sometimes feel like a job that must be attended to daily. Heterosexual women typically are not faced with disclosing their sexual orientation because they are assumed to be straight. Lesbians however are faced with disclosure and have to decide whether to come out of the closet, or not to come out. However, as Guittar and Rayburn (2015) stated, “Coming out is not just a means to an end, and it is not necessarily an outward endeavor (although it can be). It is as internal as it is external, and it is an endeavor which one continues to manage throughout the life cycle—that is, coming out is a career” (p. 339). This homosexual career is easier for some than others.

The homosexual career has also been referenced as the “revolving closet door.” Eden, a participant in the work of Johnson (2008, as cited in Guittar & Rayburn, 2015) mentioned the revolving closet door. Eden admitted to being “very out” but yet found herself having to be “forthright about her being gay, each semester she encounters new students who are unaware of her sexuality” (Guittar & Rayburn, 2015, p. 349). Hence the revolving door: The coming out process is something an LGBTQ person goes through each time they meet someone new or someone that isn’t in the know about their sexual orientation.

Disclosure can be difficult. When someone discloses that they are a lesbian, they are openly admitting to being a member of a stigmatized group. However, admitting this membership can reduce the “psychological strain associated with hiding parts of the self (Goffman, 1963). This is consistent with self-verification theory, which suggests that being open about one’s sexual orientation can fulfill a basic need to confirm and affirm one’s identity” (King, Reilly, & Hebl, 2008, p. 567).

Conclusion

Because Donovan (2019) is one of the only researchers to study LGBTQ interpreters, much of this literature review explored research from other fields of study regarding the LGBTQ community. Social Stigma Theory was first investigated in regard to how the LGBTQ population is impacted by negative stereotypes. Stigmas and stereotypes lead to feelings of rejection, decreased self-worth, and exclusion. Next gender labels and how they have had an impact on the history of the lesbian appearance, appearance norms, and what appearance communicates to others were discussed. The literature review was concluded with the discussion of coming out or disclosure. This

included exploration of the lesbian workplace in regard to coming out, coming out data from other studies, the Cass Model of coming out, and the concept of the “homosexual career” or the “revolving closet door.”

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Human beings, who are almost unique in having the ability to learn from the experience of others, are also remarkable for their apparent disinclination to do so.

—Douglas Adams (n.d.)

Survey Recruitment

This study focused on a unique marginalized group of people that had to meet three requirements in order to participate in the survey. A participant must have been over the age of 18, they must have been currently working as an interpreter, and they must have self-identified as a lesbian who had already disclosed their identity to others. Recruitment for this specific group of interpreters was done using a social networking site (Facebook) and email. The recruitment information used was the same throughout the study and included written text explaining the study and the requirements, a link to the survey, and a flyer (see Appendix B).

Three Facebook groups were found that had members that could be potential participants and/or knew someone else that could qualify and be interested in participating in the study: (a) ASL Interpreters – Queer Space, (b) BLeGIT* Queer Member Section of RID Interpreters, and (c) #InterpretingStudies@WOU2019. Additionally, the recruitment information was also posted to the principal investigator's personal Facebook page and was shared and reshared by 38 people.

There was a process of acceptance before announcements could be posted in both ASL Interpreters – Queer Space and BLeGIT* Queer Member Section of RID Interpreters Facebook groups. The principal investigator first had to be accepted as a member of the group. Both groups needed facilitator approval before the recruitment

post was visible to the members. The principal investigator was already a member of the group #InterpretingStudies@WOU2019 and did not need any further permission to post. Recruitment was additionally done via email through the principal investigators' employer and their email distribution list. This was a specific distribution list of LGBTQ-identified persons who are employed by Sorenson Video Relay Service.

Recruitment officially began on October 1, 2019 and ended October 15, 2019. The survey and flyer were first published on social media and then emailed to Sorenson's LGBTQ distribution list (see Appendix C). After October 15, 2019, the survey was no longer accessible. There were several individuals who inquired after the set time frame but were denied access by the principal investigator.

Survey Design

In order to gather large amounts of data in a short amount of time, surveys and questionnaires can be utilized. Hale and Napier (2013) mentioned that the majority of questions tend to limit the amount of answers given by using close-ended questions: "Questionnaires normally elicit three types of information: factual, behavioral and attitudinal. Factual questions elicit demographic information that is relevant to the research aims" (Hale & Napier, 2013, p. 59).

The survey used for this study used all three types of questions. The Google Forms was used as the survey platform. The survey consisted of nine sections and a total of 46 questions (see Appendix D). The sections consisted of:

1. Introduction to the study
2. Consent (see Appendix A)
3. Interpreting and coming out questions

4. Coming out in your personal life
5. Demographics
6. Interpreter Demographics
7. Optional
8. Interview Information
9. Survey Complete

The survey questions were both close-ended and open-ended. Several of the close-ended questions would have an option to mark Other and write in their response. Sometimes, if the participant would choose Other, they would be given the opportunity to explain their reasoning.

Data Analysis Procedures

The survey closed on October 15, 2019 with a total of 89 respondents. Of these 89 responses, 54 identified as lesbian, three identified as gay and/or lesbian, four identified as queer and/or lesbian, and two identified as gay, queer, and/or lesbian. As long as the respondents mentioned that they were in fact a lesbian but might prefer to be called gay or queer their responses were used. However, there were other participants whose responses were scrapped because they didn't explicitly mention that they were a lesbian. Of the remaining 26 participants, six identified as bisexual, one as asexual, one as a transgender lesbian, one as a lesbian identified bisexual, four pansexual, one that prefers to say that they are "married," one that prefers to "go by their name," four identified as gay, and seven who identified as queer. After the 26 responses were removed from the initial 89, this left 63 viable survey responses for analysis.

Those 63 participant responses were then transferred into an Excel spreadsheet that had one spreadsheet document for topics related to coming out and one related to appearance. From there each question from the survey and the responses were put into one tab per question. The responses to close-ended questions were sorted by answers and put into a chart. If two or more close-ended questions were being analyzed at a time, then those would first go into a pivot table and then into a chart. These charts, especially the pie charts helped me see the bigger picture and know where to look for details in further questions. The responses to open-ended questions were analyzed by coding with a key word or thought and were highlighted within the Excel spreadsheet. This helped me to see and develop themes within the responses. These key words were then counted, put into charts, and compared to other key words and charts.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provided a multitude of data and several descriptions of participant experiences in regard to their lesbian identity, there are several limitations that can be considered for future research. This study was limited to only cisgender women who identified as lesbian and who were “out of the closet” with themselves, their family, and at work. However, the participants were mostly from urbanized areas, had a higher education, and were primarily White.

This study provided data on only those lesbians who were out and willing to disclose their LGBTQ identity as a lesbian. One limitation might have been that these participants were more “out” than the general lesbian interpreter. It would be beneficial to also explore the experiences of those who are not “out” and are not willing to share their sexuality with others. It is difficult to identify those who are closeted because they

may not be as willing to participate. It would then be important for that research to seek those who are less “out” during their recruitment stage.

For future research, it would be important to seek out those who live in rural areas and see if their experiences are different than those in urban areas. Also, there is an extreme need to explore the experiences of those from diverse racial backgrounds.

Lastly, it would be important to explore the lives of those who wanted to participate in this study but labeled themselves as Queer or Gay, instead of lesbian. They too will be able to provide a unique interpreter experience.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Demographics

Demographic information was collected as a part of this survey, such as age, ethnicity, geographic location, education, certification, work setting, and years of experience. Responses showed that the ages 36-55 between were the majority at 42.9% (see Figure 1). The ages 56 and over had the smallest percentage of participants at 12.7%.

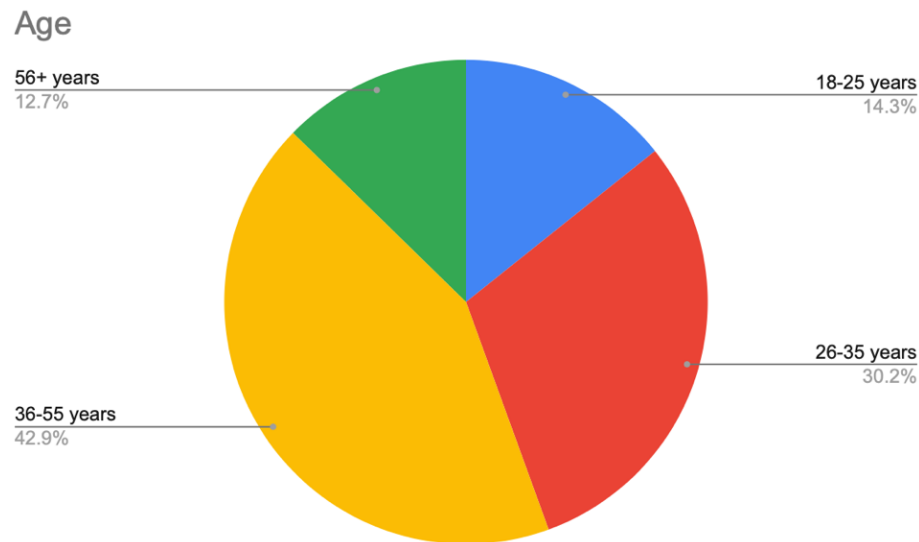


Figure 1. Age

Participants also responded to questions about ethnicity, as shown in Figure 2. This survey found that the majority of participants specified their ethnicity as White (93.7%). Among these participants, 3.2% specified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino, 1.6% as Middle Eastern and Western European, and 1.6% specified White and Jewish.

Ethnicity

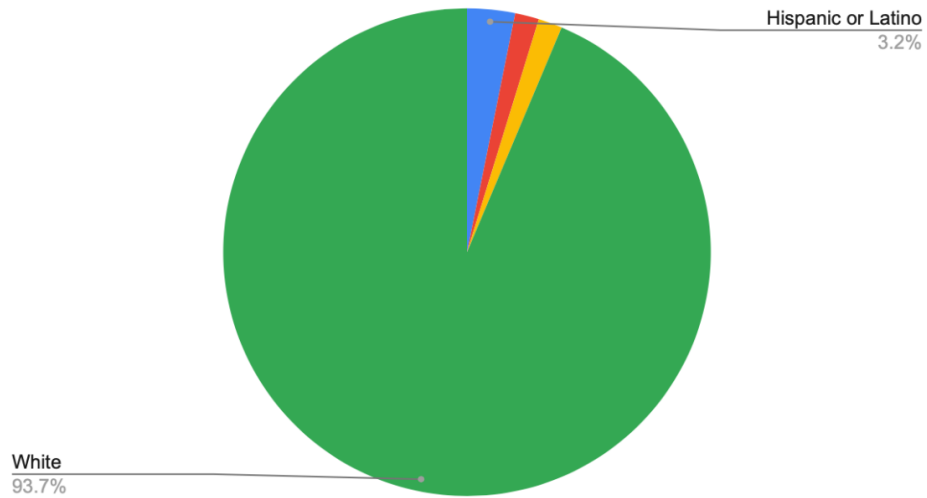


Figure 2. Ethnicity

For the geographic locations (see Figure 3), the United States was divided into nine regions:

- Pacific: AK, CA, HI, OR, WA
- Mountain: AZ, CO, ID, NM, MT, UT, NV, WY
- West South Central: AR, LA, OK, TX
- East South Central: AL, KY, MS, TN
- South Atlantic: DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV, PR
- West North Central: IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD
- East North Central: IN, IL, MI, OH, WI
- Mid-Atlantic: NJ, NY, PA
- New England: CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT

The region with the greatest number of responses was the Pacific with 31.7%. Mid-Atlantic and the East South Central had the fewest amount of responses, both at 3.2%. This is shown in Figure 3.

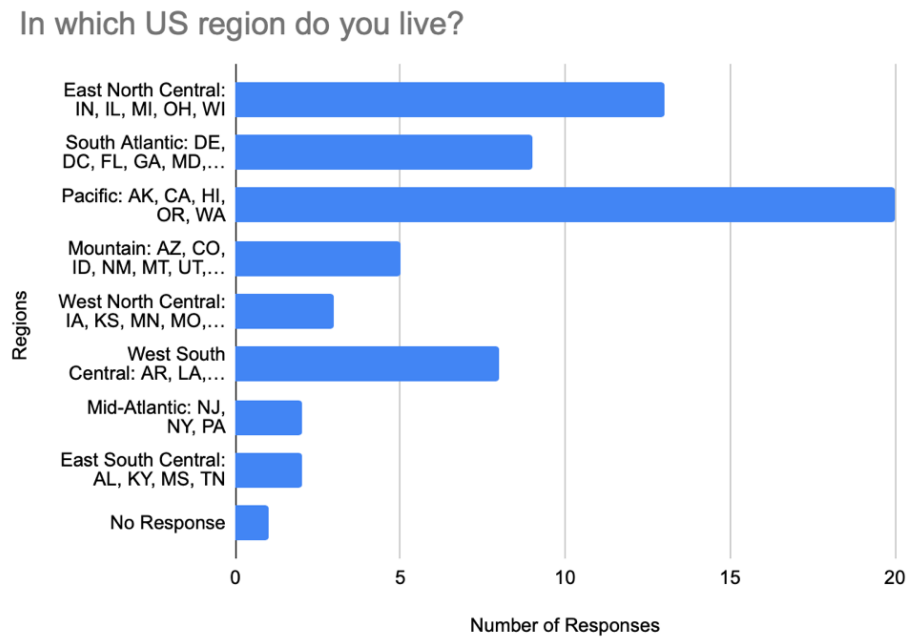


Figure 3. Geographic Location of Survey Participants

Data was collected on the highest level of education by the participants.

Education was split into the categories as followed:

- High school diploma or GED
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral or professional degree

Figure 4 shows that the majority (58.7%) of participants had received a bachelor's degree. The lowest level of education received was doctoral or professional degree with 3.2%.

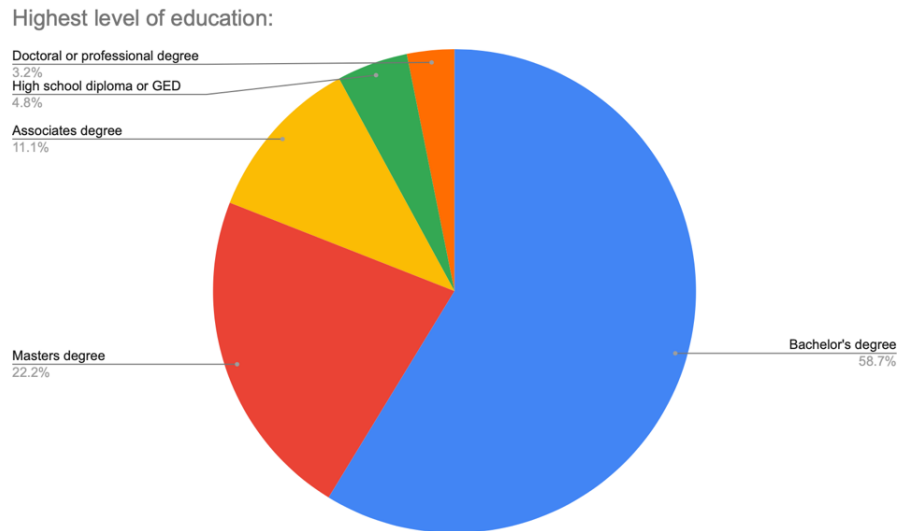


Figure 4. Highest Level of Education of Participants

Participants were also asked about certifications they held; participants could select more than one certification. The nine categories included:

- NIC
- CDI
- CI/CT (one or both)
- NAD
- Ed: K-12
- SC:L
- BEI
- None
- Other

The NIC and the CI/CI comprise the majority of certifications held by participants, with 19.8%, shown in Figure 5. The CDI represented the fewest number of certifications, with 1.2%. Of those who took this survey, 9.3% held no certification at all.

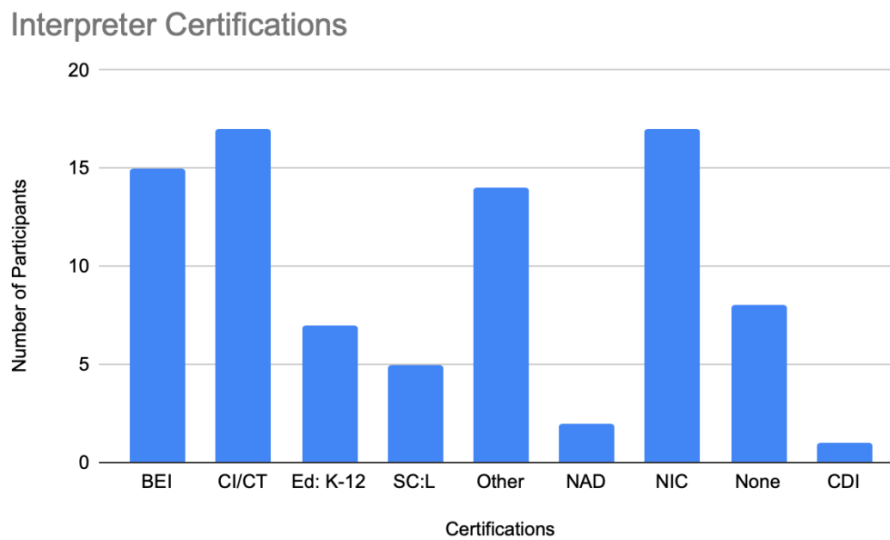


Figure 5. Interpreter Certifications

Participants were also asked about the setting in which they work the most. In Figure 6, Freelance/Community work has the majority of participants, with 37.7%. Legal and Mental Health both share the fewest number of participants, at 1.6%. While it was intended that the participants would pick the one setting most worked in, one participant chose three settings and mentioned that they worked them all equally. This participant equates to 1.6% and can be seen in Figure 6, in yellow.

What setting do you work most in?

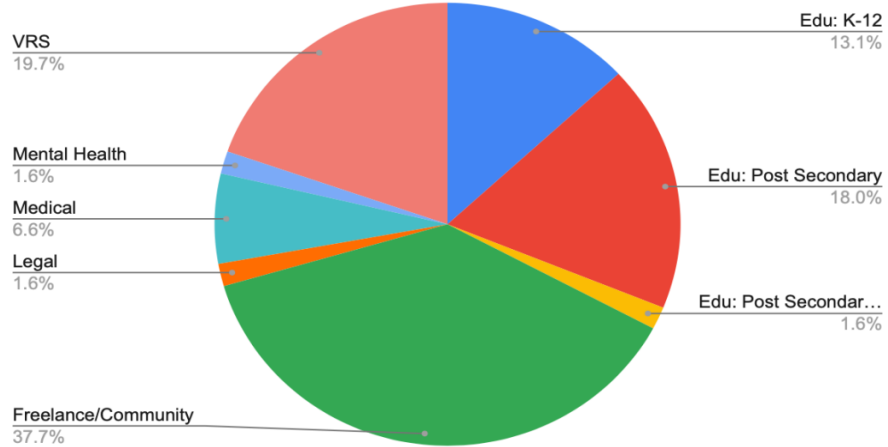


Figure 6. Settings

Lastly, years of experience is shown in Figure 7. The majority of participants had been working as an interpreter for more than 20+ years (30.2%). The fewest participants had worked the fewest years; 12.7% of interpreters had worked less than one year.

Years of interpreting experience

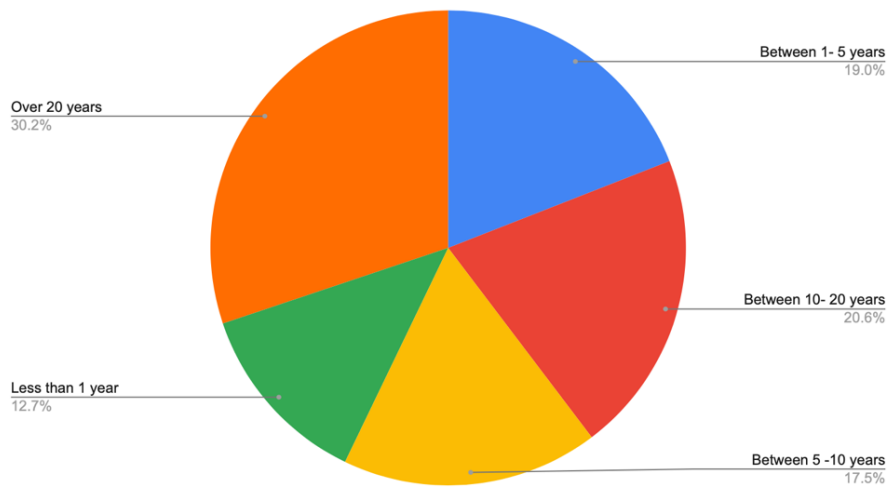


Figure 7. Years of Experience

Looking the Part

The participants were asked to pick a lesbian gender label from a given list of seven labels. Participants were not provided definitions of the lesbian gender labels. My primary interest was in the association between self-labeling.

- Butch: “the ‘masculine’ end of the gender spectrum (e.g., clothing style, hair style, mannerisms)” (Walker et al., 2012, p. 91).
- Soft butch: mostly masculine with a few feminine qualities
- High Femme: the “feminine” end of the gender spectrum (e.g., clothing style, hair style, mannerisms). Also referred to as a “lipstick lesbian.”
- Femme: traditional feminine appearance
- Butch/femme: “midpoint along the butch/femme continuum, may present relatively equal masculine and feminine traits, or may alternate between the two presentations” (Walker et al., 2012, p. 91).
- Androgynous: presenting with both male and female characteristics.
“While *androgynous* is more of a fashion term these days and not so much a term used within the queer community, it speaks to the societal pressure to look a certain way” (Thomas, 2019).
- I prefer no label
- No response

Figure 8 shows the lesbian gender label that the participants felt most closely matched their appearance. The majority of participants identified as femme, with 36.5%. While 1.6% of participants identified as high femme.

Lesbian Gender Labels

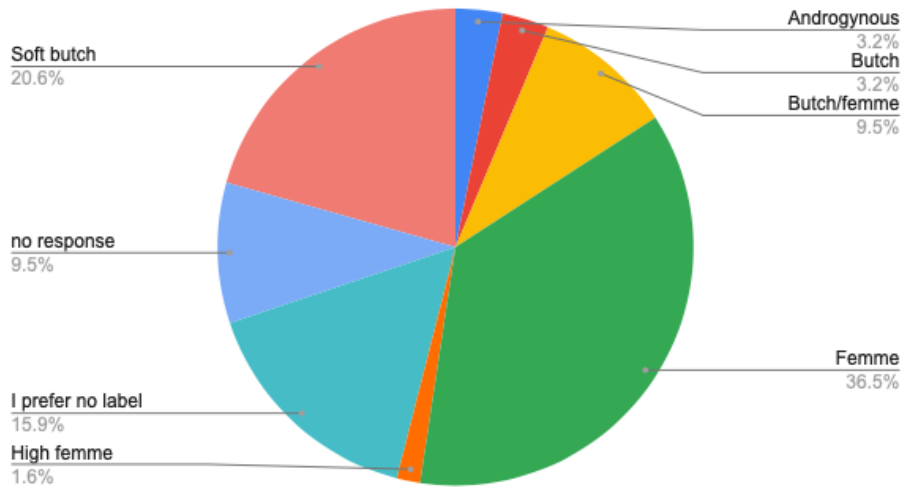


Figure 8. Lesbian Gender Label

Next participants were asked if they thought their appearance had an impact on the frequency with which they “came out” to consumers. The participants were given the options of yes, no, and maybe. Figure 9 shows that 39.7% felt that their appearance did have an impact, 36.5% thought that it might have an impact, and 23.8% did not think it had an impact on the frequency of them coming out.

Do you think your appearance impacts the frequency of "coming out" to consumers?

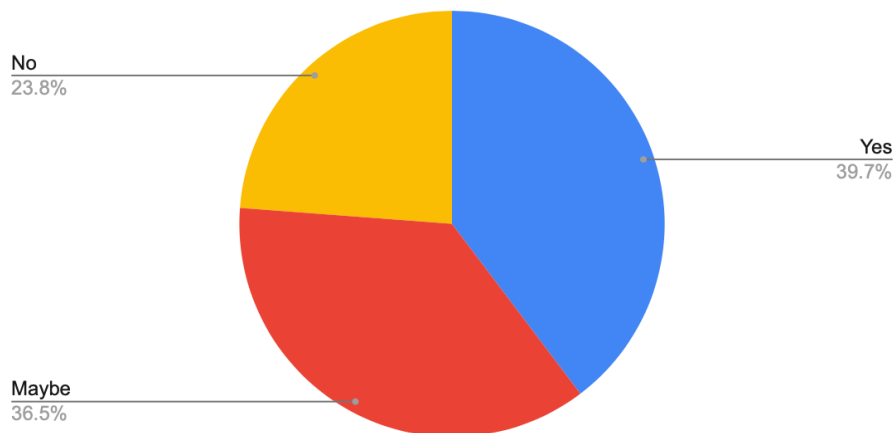


Figure 9. Frequency of “Coming Out”

Then lesbian gender labels were crossed with participant's option of their appearance impacted the frequency in which they "came out" to consumers (see Figure 10). This study showed that the 50% of the androgynous and 50% of butch lesbians thought their appearance might have an impact and the other 50% thought that it did have an impact. Next, 50% of the butch/femme lesbians thought that their appearance might have an impact, 33.3% responded no, and 16.7% thought that there was an impact. Of the femme lesbians, 52.2% thought their appearance had an impact, 26.1% said it did not, and 21.7% said it might. There was one participant who identified as a high femme, and they responded that their appearance would have an impact on frequency of coming out to consumers. Those who preferred no label were found to have a majority of maybes at 50%, no at 40%, and yes at 10%. Those who did not specify a lesbian gender label were found to have responses of 50% yes, 33.3% maybe, and 16.7% no. And finally, the soft butch lesbians responded with 46.2% maybe, 38.5% yes, and 15.4% no.

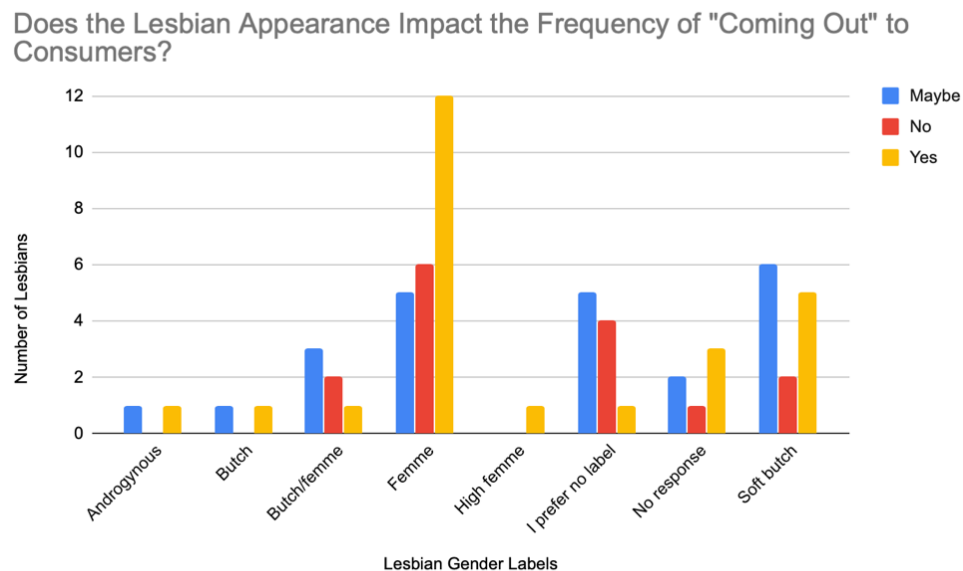


Figure 10. Impact of Lesbian Appearance

Following (see Figure 11) is responses to whether participants felt like they had an unwritten dress code at work that pressured them to conform or conceal their LGBTQ identity. The majority of participants did not feel there was an unwritten dress code, at 61.9%, while the remaining 38% was split evenly between maybe and yes.

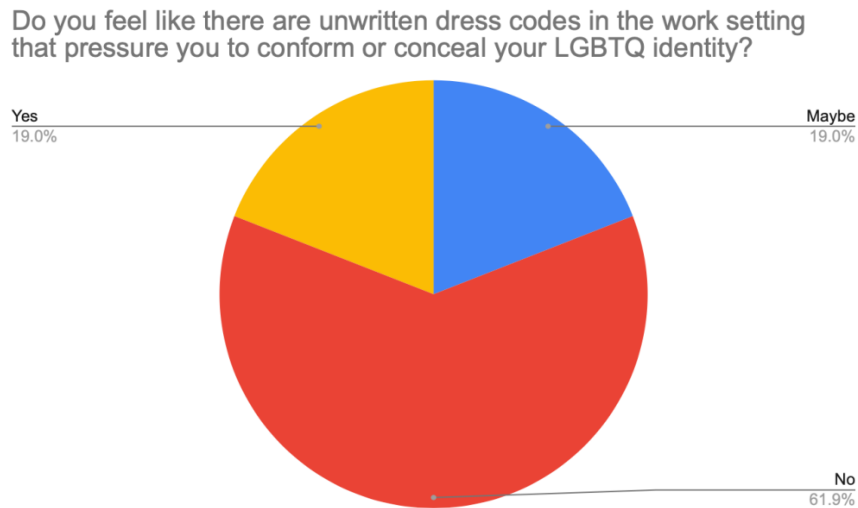


Figure 11. Unwritten Dress Codes

With the majority of participants not feeling like there was an unwritten dress code, there was also a majority of participants (73%) who did not change their appearance to look more heterosexual. However, 17.5% remarked that they would sometimes change their appearance and 9.5% said that they did change their appearance. This is shown in Figure 12.

When working, do you change your appearance to look more heterosexual?

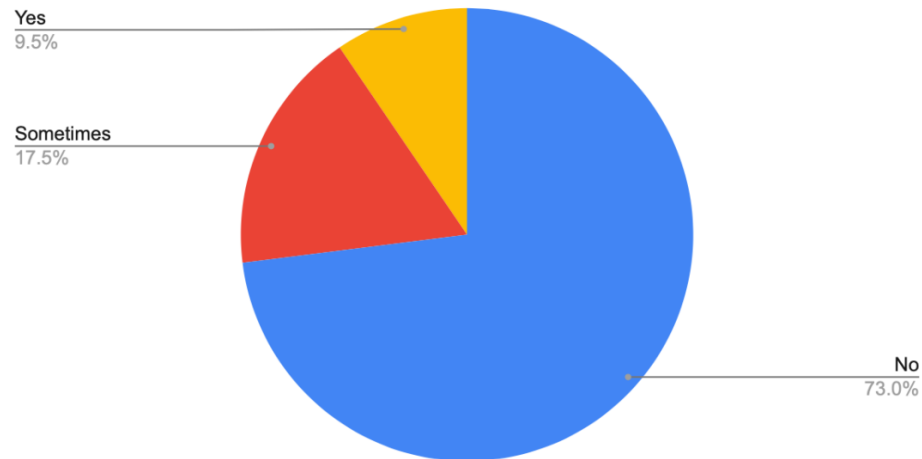


Figure 12. Change in Appearance

Will the Real Lesbian Please Stand Up?

First the study looked at the work setting and whether the participants thought they were identifiable as a lesbian. With a slight majority, 38.1% of participants did think that they were identifiable. At the same time, 31.7% responded with maybe and 30.2% with no. These percentages are shown in Figure 13.

When working, do you consider yourself identifiable as a lesbian?

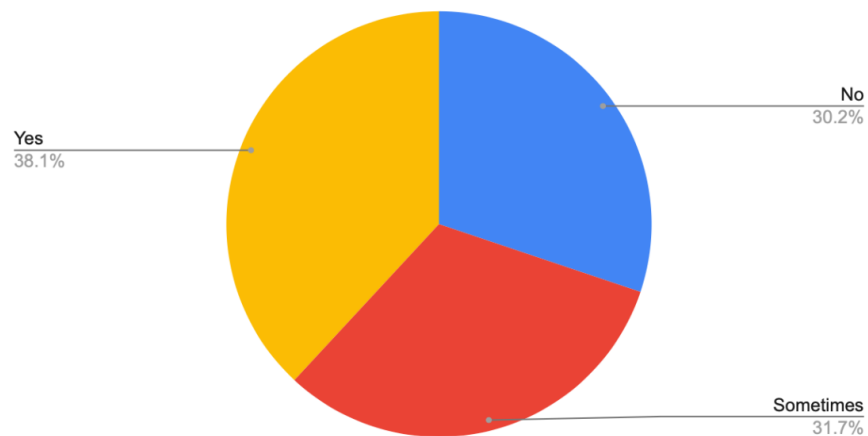


Figure 13. Identifiable at Work

The same question was asked to participants, but it was in regard to their personal life instead of at work. In their personal lives 60.3% felt identifiable, compared to 38.1% at work. This left 22.2% who sometimes felt identifiable in their personal lives and 17.5% who did not. This is shown in Figure 14.

In your personal life, do you consider yourself identifiable as a lesbian?

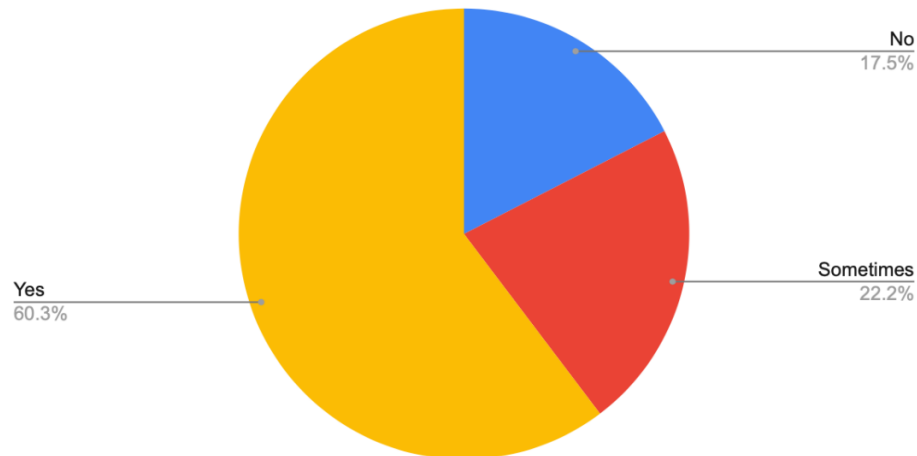


Figure 14. Identifiable in Personal Life

Next participants' responses were compared to their other responses. Data was compared and analyzed with work versus personal life in regard to identifiability. The majority of responses stayed the same, with 58.7%. However, 20.6% of responses changed from sometimes identifiable at work to yes identifiable in personal life. Out of the total, 11.1% of the participants said that they were not identifiable at work but were sometimes identifiable in their personal lives. Those who responded with not identifiable at work but were identifiable in their personal lives comprised 4.8%. Those who said they were sometimes identifiable at work but not in their personal lives counted for 1.6%. Those that stated that they were identifiable at work but not in their personal lives totaled

1.6%. The final 1.6% said that they were identifiable at work but only sometimes in their personal lives. This is shown in Figure 15, where y=yes, s=sometimes, and n=no.

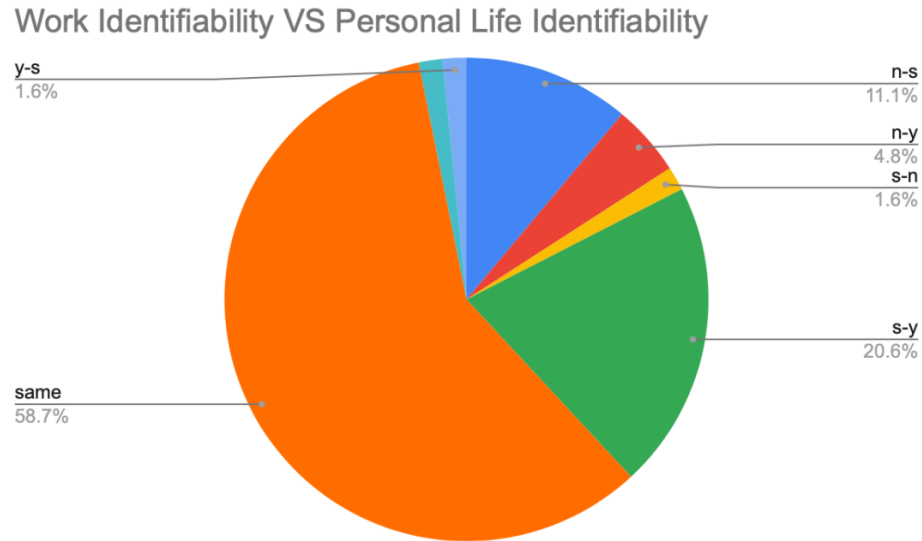


Figure 15. Work Versus Personal Identifiability

Finally, data were analyzed on those who did change or sometimes changed their appearance to look more heterosexual. Then that information was crossed with those whose identifiability changed from work to their personal lives. I looked at those who had said they were sometimes identifiable at work and then said yes to being identifiable in their personal lives. I also looked at those who said they were not identifiable at work but were sometimes identifiable in their personal lives. This concluded with 19.05% of those who changed their appearance to be more heterosexual believed that they became less identifiable at work compared to their personal lives, and 7.94% of those who changed their appearance at work to appear more heterosexual thought that their identifiability stayed the same.

Disclosure of the Invisible Stigma

There were three overall themes found when a participant was asked to describe a scenario of when they could have “come out” or did “come out” to a consumer. These themes involved other LGBTQ people and/or LGBTQ environment, family, and being outed. Of the 63 participants, 13 had mentioned an LGBTQ theme, 13 mentioned family, and 5 mentioned being outed.

A common scenario given was if a consumer “comes out” as LGBTQ themselves first or mentions something indicating that they are an ally, then the interpreter will in return “come out” themselves. One participant in this survey stated, “If a consumer has told me they’re LGBTQ+, I will let them know I’m a lesbian. I typically avoid the topic since it’s considered unprofessional to talk about your personal life too much as an interpreter.” A second participant mentioned that they only come out when “I know it is safe to do so ... to consumers I know are LGBTQ2S+ themselves. I can’t think of a time I came out to a consumer when I knew little or nothing about them.”

“Any time they mention or ask about my family. I make no effort to hide,” said another participant. Mentions of spouses, children, and family were often a subject that would lead participants to come out. Another stated,

I had a very positive experience in which I did not expect. I made a false assumption that the Deaf consumer was anti-LGBTQ+ and when directly asked I stated my partner was female. To my surprise they were overjoyed and said they support me and LGBTQ+ community. It made me realize that just like I don’t like people making assumptions about me, I should give everyone the benefit of the doubt and not pre-determine how they will or will not respond.

A third participant responded that “when they ask me what my husband does” initiates the coming out process. “A few years ago, I was told by a consumer (female) that they saw me on a dating app—they then proceeded to ask me if I’m gay. I said yes, that I identify as a lesbian, and they responded saying ‘Oh, I didn’t know that. You don’t look gay,’” said one participant.

The third and final theme is being outed. Outing is “the act of exposing an individual’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity” (Schwartz & Fellow, 2014). Being outed generally has negative repercussions, but once in a while a positive result may occur. One participant had a negative experience with being outed by a lead professor in their ITP, which led to their removal of their leadership position within the ASL club. Even if the results are positive, one should avoid ever outing someone. “I was outed by my team once. A hearing consumer asked if all of the interpreters that worked that situation were LGBT and she answered affirmatively,” said another participant.

There are a lot of feelings that can be associated with “coming out.” There are even more feelings when the opportunity presents itself to “come out” but it isn’t taken. In the survey, participants had the option to choose from a given list and/or add their own feelings. If they wrote another feeling, their response was changed to “none of these” and will be discussed in the next section. The question was asked, “If you choose NOT to “come out” while working do you feel...?” The given options were:

- Guilty
- Like you’re living a double life
- Like you are lying
- I always “come out”

- None of these
- No response

The majority of participants did not identify with the feelings given, with 41.3%. “Like you were lying” was the feeling most identified with from the list, with 17.5%. Those who marked “guilty + lying” and those who marked “double life + lying” had the least amount, with 1.6%. This is shown in Figure 16.

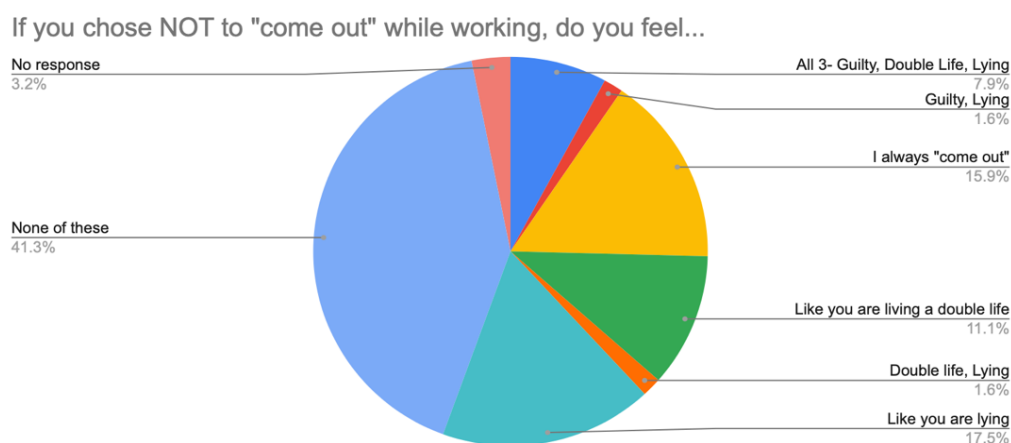


Figure 16. Feelings When NOT Out

If participants had chosen other words to describe what they felt when they could “come out” but chose not to, those responses were analyzed separately. One common theme that presented itself was safety. Participants chose not to “come out” when they felt unsafe. One participant stated, “As if I’m trying to hide myself again for safety; I don’t want to hide myself again and it makes me feel resentful that I have to for my safety.” Another participant simply responded to the question with “unsafe.” Unsafe could be emotionally, physically, and/or verbally. Other words to describe participants’ feelings were privileged, dishonest, sadness, hiding, elephant in the room, tentative, oppressed, indifferent, and disheartened.

Interpreters are famous for answering many questions with “it depends.”

However, when asked if coming out at work is beneficial, only 22.2% responded with “it depends.” At the same time, 68.3%, participants said it was beneficial to “come out,” and 9.5% responded that it wasn’t. Figure 17 shows those responses.

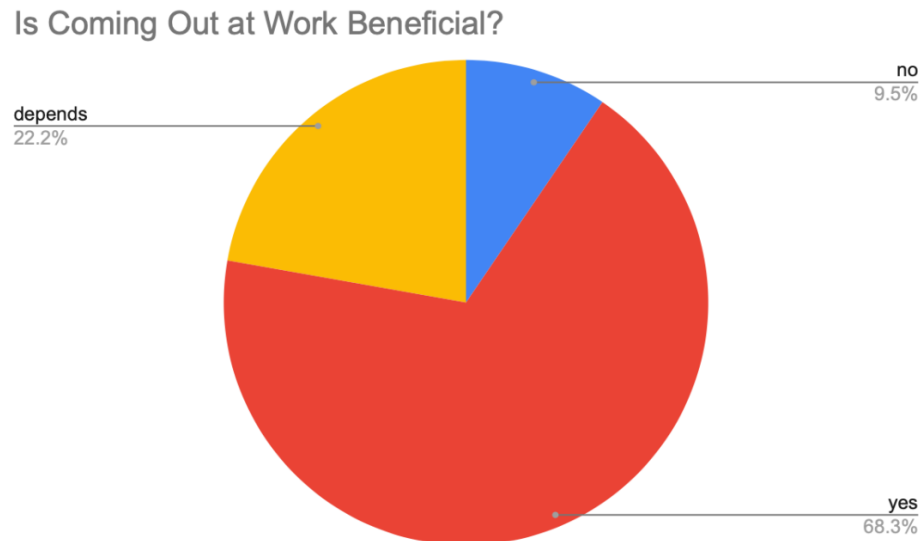


Figure 17. “Coming Out” at Work

Participants were asked why they thought it was beneficial to come out at work and several themes appeared in their responses. Every response was categorized in one or more themes. The themes that came from the data were:

- Neutral/shouldn’t matter/not their business
- Relationships/connections/community/support
- Negativity/conflict
- Mental health/stress/guilt
- Trust
- Come out to coworkers but not clients
- Safety/comfort

- Authenticity
- Visibility

A majority of participants thought it was beneficial to “come out” to consumers because it was the authentic thing to do, and it provided visibility for the LGBTQ community. Authenticity was mentioned in 29.5% of responses, and 20.5% mentioned visibility, shown in Figure 18.

Twenty-six participants made mention of authenticity. Authenticity is being genuine, original, or the real thing. One participant’s response was “It’s less stressful to feel like I’m being authentic. At times mentioning my wife functions as a signal to other LGBT people in the room that it’s safe to be themselves. At times it’s a signal to people in the room that they shouldn’t assume heteronormativity.” Similarly, another participant said, “It is good to be authentic as you work together. The purpose is to help build the relationship by revealing more of yourself when appropriate.”

Visibility was also important to 18 participants. “People need to realize our community is everywhere. Only some of us are recognized so they have a distorted picture of our community,” a participant stated. It seems as though visibility was important to help combat heteronormativity and to help others feel safe. Another participant said,

So much of interpreting requires us to juggle a million demands silently, and coming out means that there are fewer demands/microaggressions⁸ that I have to

⁸ “A comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority) (“Microaggression,” n.d.).

withstand about what I tell people, people assuming I'm straight and saying something offensive, etc. In a K-12 setting in a small town, I was very nervous about it at first. But after seeing how many kids then felt safe to come out to themselves and others, I was really glad that I did.

Safety and comfort was a third theme found in 14 participants' comments. One comment made was "I feel that coming out to consumers that are part of the LGBTQIA community helps them feel that I am a safe person to be around and makes them more comfortable having me as their interpreter." Another participant didn't feel comfortable coming out when working in the K-12 setting because their state laws allow for discrimination against sexual orientation. That same participant said, "I could very well be fired or discriminated against for being gay in an educational setting, and I have known of that happening to others. The last thing I needed was a disgruntled parent of a child not wanting their kid to have a 'lesbian interpreter' and filing formal complaints."

"Do you know why we have the sunflowers? It's not because Vincent van Gogh suffered. It's because Vincent van Gogh had a brother who loved him. Through all the pain, he had a tether, a connection to the world. And that is the focus of the story we need – connection."—Hannah Gadsby (Olb & Perry, 2018).

Much like the quote above, several participants felt the same as Hannah Gadsby in that connections are critical. Several participants mentioned the benefit of coming out because it helps build better relationships, stronger connections, build a community, and give/provide support. One participant mentioned, "The prevalence of youth and adults

who are gay need allies and it can also be a trust offering. If I trust you with a fact of my life, the Deaf consumer may feel better having the interpreter be privy to their life too.”

Coming out to consumers in return builds trust that leads to those stronger relationships. It also was mentioned that coming out was helpful with decreasing stress and guilt, which leads to an overall better mental health state. As one participant said: “I don’t have to feel guilty or worry about what will happen if the consumer found out. I feel more comfortable being me.”

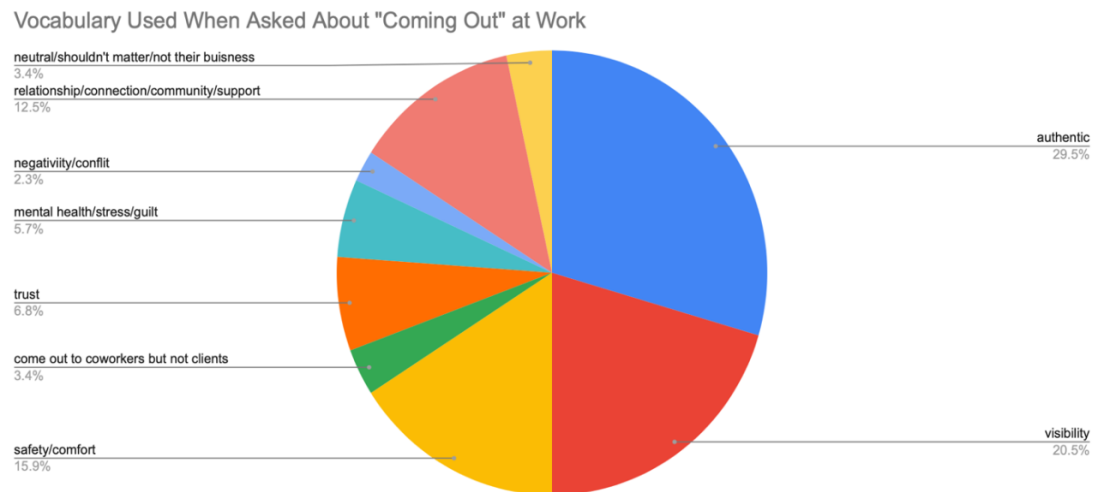


Figure 18. Vocabulary Used When Asked About “Coming Out” at Work

From Hiding Out to Coming Out

The next section reveals data about the number of years participants have been “out” to themselves, to their family, and at work. “Disclosure to coworkers is one of the final milestones cited in many models of healthy gay identity development because it can precede the emergence of a positive homosexual identity (King et al., 2008, p. 568). In Figure 19, the majority of participants had been out for more than 20 years to themselves, with 38.1%. Among participants in this study, 1.6% had been out to themselves between one and three years. Figure 20 shows that 31.7% had been “out” to their family for more

than 20 years. Between six months to one year had the fewest participants who were “out” to their family, with 1.6%. And lastly, Figure 21 shows that 27% of participants are out at work for more than 20 years, with 4.8% of participants “out” at work for less than six months.

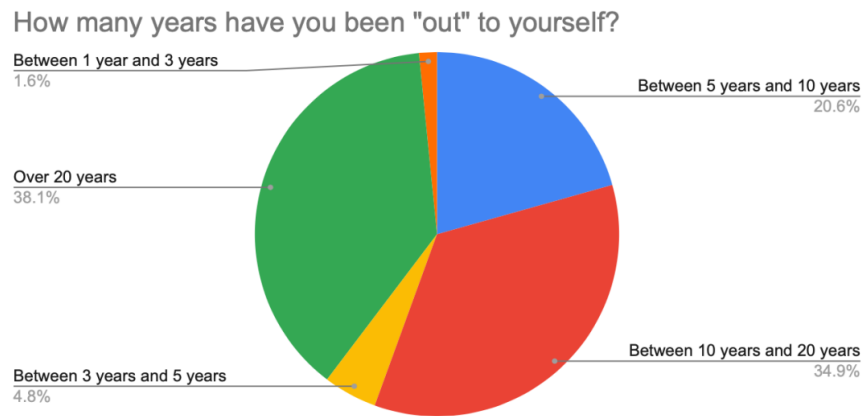


Figure 19. Years “Out” to Self

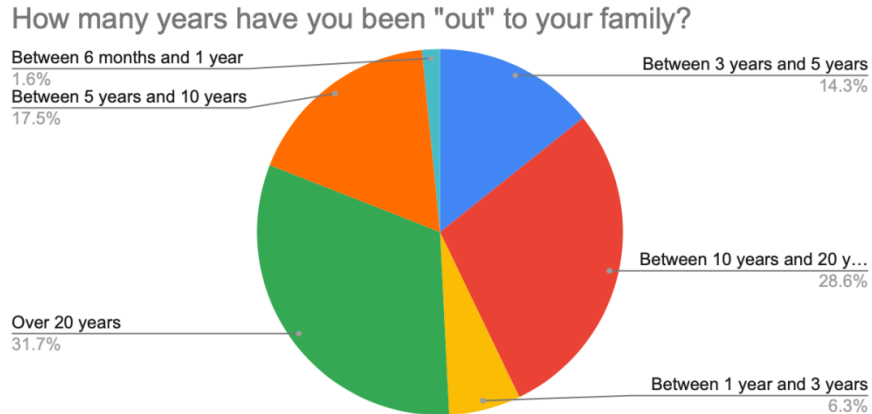


Figure 20. Years “Out” to Family

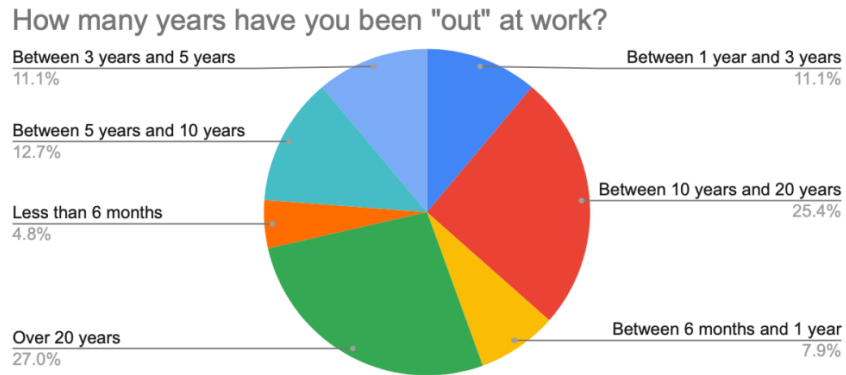


Figure 21. Years "Out" at Work

Data were then collected on stress. Figure 22 shows the percentages of participants' responses to the question, "Does coming out cause you stress at work?" Among the responses, 49.2% responded that coming out at work seldom causes stress. About one-fourth (27.0%) responded that it never causes stress, 12.7% said that about half the time, 9.5% responded usually, and 1.6% had the fewest say that it always causes stress.

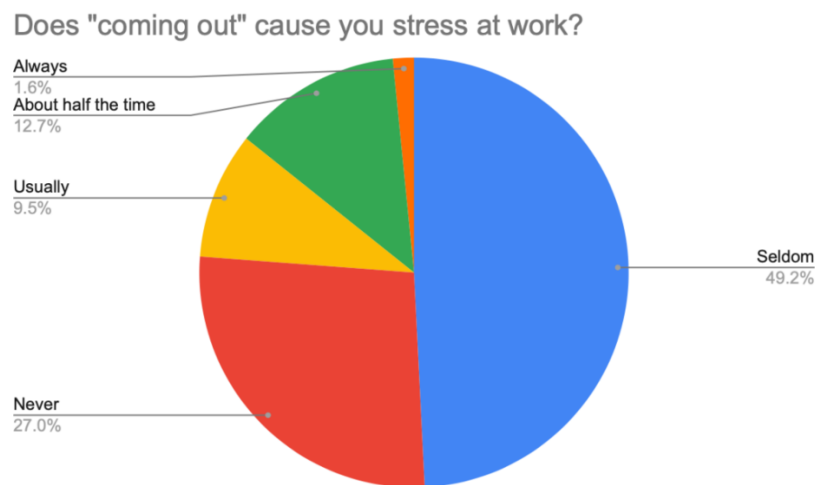


Figure 22. Stress

Finally, the data on the lesbian appearance and their coming out stress at work is shown in Figure 23. Overall, there did not appear to be any specific themes found within

the data. There was no one lesbian appearance that experienced more stress with coming out than the others. The androgynous lesbian experiences stress when coming out with 50% seldom and 50% never. The butch-appearing lesbian responded with 100% seldom. Responses from the butch/femme were 33.3% never, 50% seldom, and 16.7% usually. The femme participants responded 13% about half the time, 26.1% never, 43.5% seldom, and 17.4% usually. There was only one participant who identified as high femme, and they responded with about half the time. Those who preferred no label varied with 10% about half the time, 30% never, and 60% seldom. Those who had no response to their appearance were 50% never and 16.7% for about half the time, seldom, and usually. Last, the soft butch was the only lesbian gender label that had someone respond with always (7.7%); 15.4 responses with about half the time and never, and 61.5% seldom.

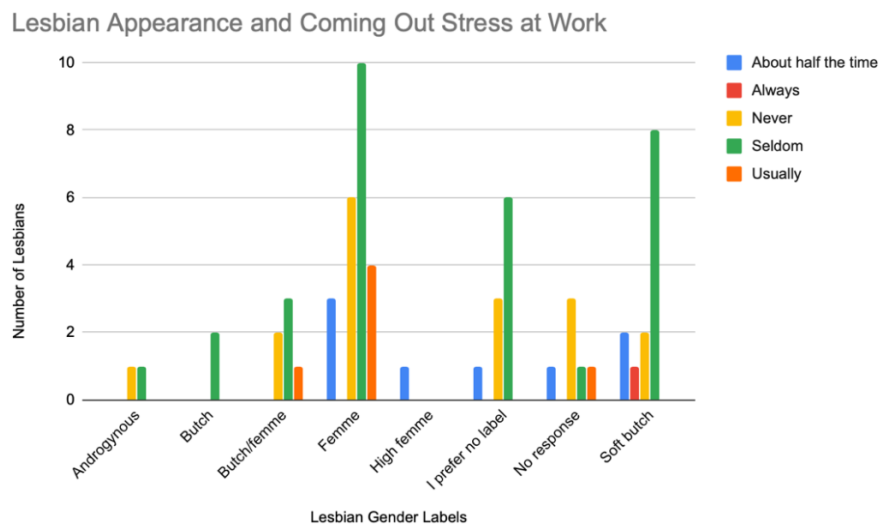


Figure 23. Appearance and Stress

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The ASL/English interpreting field is a fairly new profession and the research is limited but growing. While there is beneficial research on the LGBTQ population, sometimes experiences cannot be clumped together. At times, it is important to look at just the lesbian population themselves. Finding research on lesbian ASL/English interpreters has been nearly impossible, until now. The purpose of this study was examining the experiences of lesbian interpreters. By using a phenomenological framework and social stigma theory, 63 participants were recruited to share their experiences via survey. The original plan was to first put out the survey and then do follow up interviews. However, the data provided in the survey was sufficient to answer the research questions in this study. Overall, the data was overwhelmingly positive, prideful, educational, and left me with the thoughts and feelings of “WE ARE QUEER, AND WE HERE!” The data provided and the participants’ comments led to two major themes and several minor themes within that.

The first major theme involved appearance. Most of the participants identified with the lesbian gender labels of femme (36.5%) or soft butch (20.6%). However, out of the 63 participants, 15.9% preferred not to choose a label and 9.5% didn’t respond. From some of the responses, I think this is because that the LGBTQ population is trying to avoid these stereotypical labels. Huxley et al. (2013) found that

appearance and style are still an important method through which lesbian (and to some extent, bisexual) women demonstrate their social identity and group affiliation. However, favored lesbian appearance norms do appear to be changing

and are becoming less distinctive, and this shift was linked to a perceived increase in social acceptance of sexual diversity. (p. 212)

I chose to use the labels in order to see if there were themes within each label. One participant stated at the end of the survey,

I appreciate your survey and desire to gather/analyze this information. I would like to add that some of your questions didn't provide answer options that fit my experience. For example, I have chosen to live in quite liberal areas, where people run the gamut of looks and identities. To ask if people can identify me as gay by look ... I don't know, as it depends on their own experiences and stereotypes. I don't look butch, but I also don't look femme. There are folks around me who look quite butch or queer and are happily heterosexually married ... there are very feminine looking young women and/or moms who are lesbian/bi/queer. I think some of the answer options you provided really boxed me in, response-wise.

The norms of the lesbian appearance have shown a dramatic change over the years as well as the acceptance of the LGBTQ community by society as a whole. There seems to be fewer lesbians in the closet and more lesbians who will dress and behave in the ways that they are comfortable with. It is, then, bolstering to know that 73% of the participants do not change their appearance to appear more heterosexual when working (see Figure 12). It was then interesting to note that 36.5% of participants felt more identifiable as a lesbian in their personal lives compared to their work lives. At the same time, 58.7% felt that they were just as identifiable at work as in their personal lives.

A sub-theme of unidentifiable lesbians appeared in the data. Those interpreters who felt that they were unidentifiable experienced different emotions, feelings,

behaviors, and/or extra stress. Those who are able to pass as straight, at times, have to make a conscious effort to come out compared to those who are visibly or assumed to be gay. “I worry sometimes about taking on LGBTQ events that are looking for interpreters since I’m not ‘visibly gay.’ When I do take those assignments, I am sure to wear some type of identifier (i/e rainbow necklace or bracelet, etc.),” said one interpreter. “As a woman begins to present herself as lesbian, she must demonstrate that she belongs to the group. Physical alterations may carry great importance for a lesbian, and paying attention to one’s dress is a way of signaling group membership” (Rothblum, 1994, as cited in Cogan & Erickson, 1999, p. 85).

A second interpreter felt sad because of their lack of visibility due to the fact that they were femme in appearance. There is a cost to passing as straight. Some of these costs are “feeling of being a hypocrite, living in pretense, and the inability to “be oneself” (Jordan & Deluty, 1998, p. 43). “Weinberg and Williams (1974) demonstrated that keeping one’s sexual orientation a secret was related to feelings of depression and awkwardness in interpersonal relationships, along with ashamed and anxiety” (Jordan & Deluty, 1998, p.43). They also mentioned that they felt dishonest when they didn’t come out. They also felt sad because of their lack of visibility due to the fact that they were femme in appearance. “Bowring and Brewis’s (2009) observation that lesbians who dressed more ‘butch’ faced fewer problems at work than those who dressed in a more feminine way” (Einarsdóttir et al., 2015, p. 500). A third interpreter mentioned the concept of the revolving closet door by saying, “‘Coming Out’ is not a one-and-done. It’s sometimes an everyday thing. I don’t present as an easily identifiable lesbian, so people don’t automatically assume I’m queer.”

The second major theme revolved around the concept of “coming out.” As difficult as it can be for some to “come out” to consumers for numerous reasons, the majority of lesbian interpreters felt very comfortable or somewhat comfortable coming out to consumers. By a majority, I mean 81% of 63 interpreters felt some level of comfort telling a consumer that they were a member of the LGBTQ community. This can be seen in Figure 24. There are many factors that could lead to that level of comfortability. And perhaps, one factor is because of the fact that 52.4% of the 63 participants had been “out” at work for more than 10 years. This leads to the question: Is it easier to “come out” the longer you have been “out”?

Please select one sentence that best describes you the best.

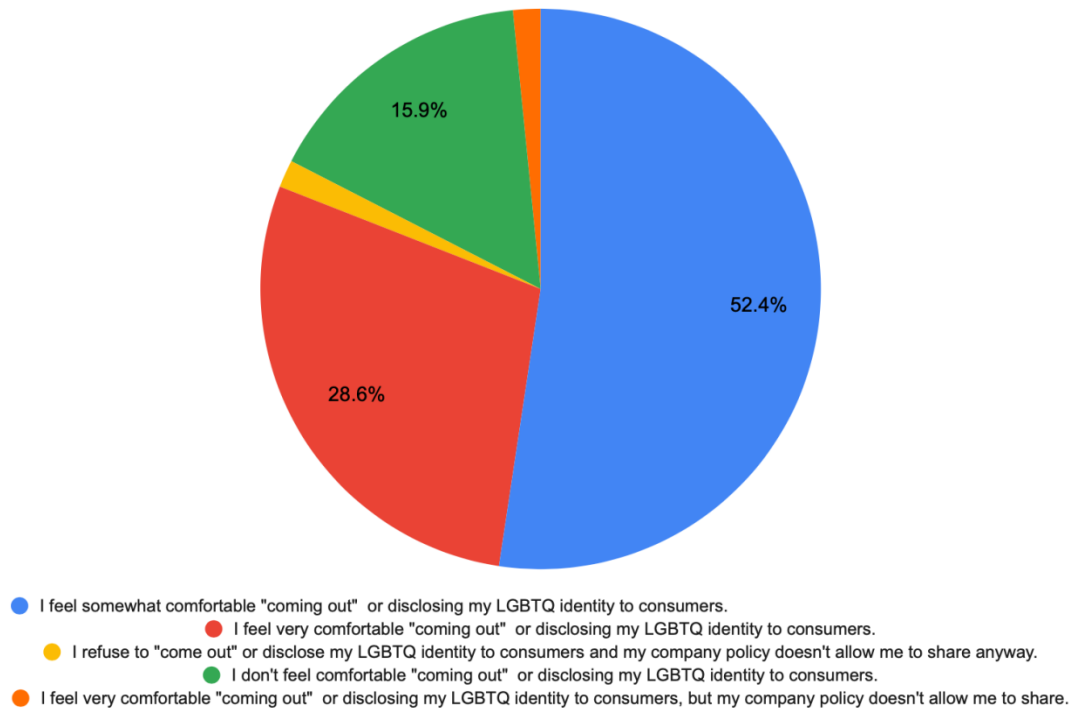


Figure 24. Comfortability “Coming Out” to Consumers

Another theme was when to come out to a consumer. Often an interpreter would “come out” after the consumer did or mentioned something signifying, they were an

LGBTQ ally. A second time that an interpreter would come out is when asked about their family. That might be a question of “are you married?,” “do you have a husband?,” or “do you have children?” Most interpreters did not want to hide the fact that they had a female partner/spouse and would disclose their identity by responding by saying “my wife” or “my partner.” It was apparent these interpreters would not “come out” by simply stating that they are a lesbian. One participant said, “If asked or talking about personal life sometimes I’ll talk about my girlfriend, but I never say, ‘hey I’m a lesbian.’”

Among these participants, 68.3% of interpreters felt that it was beneficial to “come out” at work. There were several reasons that these interpreters felt that it was beneficial to “come out” at work. Some of these reasons were authenticity, visibility, trust, and building relationships with coworkers and clients. However, it was overly apparent that those who did not feel safe would not “come out.” K-12 interpreters, specifically, mentioned several times that they struggled coming out at work because of the fear of losing their job. A participant stated, “I had a lot more stress working in K-12 and now I no longer work there.” It then should not come as a surprise that if the majority of interpreters felt comfortable coming out, then the majority would not be stressed by it. Consequently, 76.2% of those interpreters never or seldom felt stressed by coming out at work.

While the majority of the data appeared positive and suggests that the lesbian interpreter population is moving in a constructive, uplifting, and progressive way, there were some staggering comments within. The last theme comes from the data of those who did feel stress and/or unsafe. These interpreters made remarks about having to hide, how people hate them, loss of work, as well as emotional and physical harm. As one

interpreter stated, “If consumers/coworkers/team terps don’t ‘approve’ of you, you can lose work and it can be detrimental to the work environment. It can also be harmful for your own mental health if you come out in an unsafe environment.”

Interpreters’ geographic location also plays a part in their level of safety and comfortability when coming out. One participant simply stated that it just isn’t safe where they live to come out. A second interpreter said, “There are still places you can be terminated for sexuality. Conservatism and homophobia of consumers (Deaf or Hearing) could put someone in danger (emotionally, physically, mentally, job availability).”

Another said, “As much as people want to believe that we live in a world where it doesn’t matter what your sexual orientation is, there are millions of people who still HATE us. I don’t want the consumer to feel uncomfortable by something (my sexual orientation) they don’t have to know about me. I’m a femme lesbian so you would never guess I’m gay ... it can lead to loss of work, poor experiences, the trauma of people being openly (or less openly) homophobic, risk of reputation concerns.”

While the majority of the lesbian interpreters who took this survey seemed to be experiencing a more positive outcome with “coming out,” that does not hold true for everyone. I am thrilled to see how far we as an LGBTQ community have come, but the fight is not over yet. “Our stories hold our cure” (Olb & Parry, 2018). And this is why I did this research. What we as lesbians go through in the back of our minds when having to make that split-second decision whether to come out or not and the impact that has on us needs to be known.

“This tension is yours. I am not helping you anymore. You need to learn what this feels like, because this tension is what not-normals carry inside of them all of the time. It is dangerous to be different.” –Hannah Gadsby

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM IRB DRAFT

WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

Survey Informed Consent for Research Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Beauty and the Butch: The Lesbian Interpreter

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Ehrlich

Cell Phone: (917)843-6542 e-mail: sehrlich18@mail.wou.edu

I, _____ volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Stephanie Ehrlich from Western Oregon University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about lesbian sign language interpreters 'coming out' at work. Additionally, only those over 18 years of age can participate in the survey. Those who are willing to participate should be fully disclosed in regard to their sexual identity as lesbian to themselves and others to minimize any emotional risk. Participants should not partake in this research if they have not disclosed their sexual identity as lesbian or are currently going through the process of disclosure to oneself or others.

1. My participation in this survey is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most participants will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the survey, I have the right to decline to answer any questions, end the survey, and/or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by closing my browser.
3. Participation completing a survey that will last approximately 20-30 minutes. There is no physical risk associated with participating in this study. Taking part in this research study may not benefit me personally, but the study results may be used to help other people in the future.
4. If I choose to disclose my name and email contact information, I understand that Stephanie Ehrlich will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this survey, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. If I do not choose to disclose my name and contact information, my identity will be anonymous. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions. All research and/or records will only be accessible to the principle investigator on a password-protected computer that is stored securely. Findings may be shared or made available through the Western Oregon University Digital Commons, other publications, and in presentations.

5. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Western Oregon University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted at (503)-838-9200, email at irb@wou.edu, or visit their website at <http://www.wou.edu/irb/>. If I should have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, I may contact principal investigator, Stephanie Ehrlich at: sehrlich18@mail.wou.edu or my Thesis Committee Chair, Amanda Smith, at: smithar@wou.edu.

6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I encourage you to share this link with anyone that meets the eligibility:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfAB7BrIvY3H-yn1Mu1PmfRFbUY7-UAcGoTavuIWKOVdF0xGw/viewform?usp=sf_link

* Required

By clicking “NEXT” at the bottom of the Consent tab within the Google Doc, I acknowledge that I am 18 years or older and I give my consent to participate in a research study.

APPENDIX B: SURVEY RECRUITMENT FACEBOOK POST

Group A: ASL Interpreters – Queer Space

Group B: RID special interest group for LGBTQ interpreters: BLeGIT*

Group C: #InterpretingStudies@WOU2019.

Hello Interpreters!

My name is Stephanie Ehrlich and I am a sign language interpreter in Wichita, Kansas. I am also a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies (MAIS) program at Western Oregon University. I am conducting my thesis research on the coming out stories of lesbian sign language interpreters who are currently working. I am requesting your participation in a short survey. I identify as a lesbian interpreter, who works in K-12 and the video relay settings. My experiences with coming out has inspired this research. During this survey, I will collect demographic information, identity and appearance information, and coming out stories from your personal and work life.

The survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Western Oregon University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted at (503)-838-9200, email at irb@wou.edu, or visit their website at <http://www.wou.edu/irb/>. If I have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, I may contact principal investigator, Stephanie Ehrlich at: sehrlich18@mail.wou.edu or their Thesis Committee Chair, Amanda Smith, at: smithar@wou.edu.

I will collect responses until October 15, 2019 and after that date, the survey will be closed. If you agree to participate, click on this link to begin the survey: <https://docs.google.com/.../1FAIpQLSfAB7BrIvY3H-yn1.../viewform...>

Thank you for your support!

Sincerely,

Stephanie Ehrlich



— ATTENTION —

LESBIAN INTERPRETERS

ARE YOU OUT???
I NEED YOU!

Participants in this study should meet the following criteria:

- Over the age of 18
- Currently working as an interpreter
 - Identify as a lesbian and have previously disclosed their identity to themselves and others

APPENDIX C: SURVEY RECRUITMENT EMAIL

To: Members of the LGBTQ Special Interest Group

Hello Interpreters!

My name is Stephanie Ehrlich and I am a sign language interpreter in Wichita, Kansas. I am also a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies (MAIS) program at Western Oregon University. I am conducting my thesis research on the coming out stories of lesbian sign language interpreters who are currently working. I am requesting your participation in a short survey. I identify as a lesbian interpreter, who works in K-12 and the video relay settings. My experiences with coming out has inspired this research. During this survey, I will collect demographic information, identity and appearance information, and coming out stories from your personal and work life.

The survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Western Oregon University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted at (503)-838-9200, email at irb@wou.edu, or visit their website at <http://www.wou.edu/irb/>. If I have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, I may contact principal investigator, Stephanie Ehrlich at: sehrlich18@mail.wou.edu or their Thesis Committee Chair, Amanda Smith, at: smithar@wou.edu.

I will collect responses until October 15, 2019 and after that date, the survey will be closed. If you agree to participate, click on this link to begin the survey: <https://docs.google.com/.../1FAIpQLSfAB7BrIvY3H-yn1.../viewform...>

This survey is not required or sponsored by SVRS.

Thank you for your support!

Sincerely,

Stephanie Ehrlich



— ATTENTION —

LESBIAN INTERPRETERS

ARE YOU OUT???
I NEED YOU!

Participants in this study should meet the following criteria:

- Over the age of 18
- Currently working as an interpreter
- Identify as a lesbian and have previously disclosed their identity to themselves and others

APPENDIX D: SURVEY QUESTIONS

SECTION 1: Beauty and the Butch: The Lesbian Interpreter

Hello, Colleagues and Friends.

My name is Stephanie Ehrlich. I am a student at Western Oregon University pursuing a Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies degree.

I am researching the "coming out" stories of lesbian interpreters. This study aims to bolster the scant research done previously of this marginalized group of interpreters. The results of this study could benefit many communities and lead to further research within the LGBTQ+ interpreting community. The survey should take 20-30 minutes to complete.

Participants in this study should meet the following criteria:

- Over the age of 18
- Currently working as an interpreter
- Identify as a lesbian and should have previously disclosed their identity to themselves and others in order to minimize any emotional risk

Thank you for your consideration,
Stephanie Ehrlich

SECTION 2: Consent

Principal Investigator:	Stephanie Ehrlich	
Cell Phone:	(917)843-6542	e-mail: sehrlich18@mail.wou.edu

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Stephanie Ehrlich from Western Oregon University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about lesbian sign language interpreters 'coming out' at work. Additionally, only those over 18 years of age can participate in the survey. Those who are willing to participate should be fully disclosed in regard to their sexual identity as lesbian to themselves and others to minimize any emotional risk. Participants should not partake in this research if they have not disclosed their sexual identity as lesbian, or are currently going through the process of disclosure to oneself or others.

1. My participation in this survey is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the survey, I have the right to decline to answer any questions, end the survey, and/or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by closing my browser.
3. Participation in this survey will last approximately 20-30 minutes. There is no physical risk associated with participating in this study. Taking part in this research study may not benefit me personally, but the study results may be used to help other people in the future.

4. If I choose to disclose my name and email contact information, I understand that Stephanie Ehrlich will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this survey, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. If I do not choose to disclose my name and contact information, my identity will be anonymous. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions. However, there is a possible breach of a data, confidentiality, and privacy due to the use of Google Forms and how it is shared via Facebook. Both Google and Facebook store/share/sell information that is used on their sites. All research and/or records will only be accessible to the principle investigator on a password-protected and encrypted computer that is stored securely in the office of the principle investigator. Findings may be shared or made available through the Western Oregon University Digital Commons, other publications, and in presentations.

5. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Western Oregon University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted at (503)-838-9200, email at irb@wou.edu, or visit their website at <http://www.wou.edu/irb/>. If I should have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, I may contact principal investigator, Stephanie Ehrlich at: sehrlich18@mail.wou.edu or their Thesis Committee Chair, Amanda Smith, at: smithar@wou.edu.

6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

* Required

By clicking "NEXT" I acknowledge that I am 18 years or older and I give my consent to participate in a research study.

SECTION 3: Interpreting and "coming out" questions

The remaining questions will be referring to times that you were at an interpreting assignment for a Deaf consumer but not actively interpreting. This could be before or after an assignment, a hold on the phone, a break, or anytime that the consumer is interacting with you directly.

1. Please select one sentence that best describes you the best.
 - I feel very comfortable "coming out" or disclosing my LGBTQ identity to consumers.
 - I feel very comfortable "coming out" or disclosing my LGBTQ identity to consumers, but my company policy doesn't allow me to share.
 - I feel somewhat comfortable "coming out" or disclosing my LGBTQ identity to consumers.
 - I feel somewhat comfortable "coming out" or disclosing my LGBTQ identity to consumers, but my company policy doesn't allow me to share.
 - I don't feel comfortable "coming out" or disclosing my LGBTQ identity to consumers.
 - I don't feel comfortable "coming out" or disclosing my LGBTQ identity to consumers, but my company policy doesn't allow me to share anyway.
 - I refuse to "come out" or disclose my LGBTQ identity to consumers.
 - I refuse to "come out" or disclose my LGBTQ identity to consumers and my company policy doesn't allow me to share anyway.

2. Do you think it is appropriate for an interpreter to share their LGBTQ identity with consumers?
 - Yes
 - No
 - It depends
3. If directly asked, do you feel comfortable sharing your relationship status with consumers?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes
 - My company policy doesn't allow me to do that.
4. Has a consumer ever made negative comments about your appearance that you believe were tied to your LGBTQ identity?
 - Yes
 - No
5. When working, do you change your appearance to look more heterosexual?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes
6. Has a consumer ever asked you if you were a part of the LGBTQ community?
 - Yes
 - No
7. Have you ever been called derogatory names by a consumer because of your LGBTQ identity?
 - Yes
 - No
8. Have you ever been harassed by a consumer because of your LGBTQ identity?
 - Yes
 - No
9. If a consumer asks you about your spouse how do you respond? Do you tend to use the same response each time, or does your response change depending on the situation? What kinds of phrases do you use?
10. Describe a scenario of when you could have or did "come out" to a consumer.
11. When working, do you consider yourself identifiable as a lesbian?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes
12. Do you think your appearance impacts the frequency of "coming out" to consumers?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
13. How many years have you been "out" at work?
 - Less than 6 months
 - Between 6 months and 1 year
 - Between 1 year and 3 years

- Between 3 years and 5 years
 - Between 5 years and 10 years
 - Between 10 years and 20 years
 - Over 20 years
14. Does “coming out” cause you stress at work?
- Always
 - Usually
 - About half the time
 - Seldom
 - Never
15. If you chose NOT to “come out” while working, do you feel...
- Guilty
 - Like you are living a double life
 - Like you are lying
 - None of these
 - I always “come out”
16. Do you think “coming out” at work is beneficial? Why or why not?
17. Do you think “coming out” at work is harmful? Why or why not?
18. Do you feel like there are unwritten dress codes in the work setting that pressure you to conform or conceal your LGBTQ identity?
- Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
19. Do you wear any accessories that signify your LGBTQ identity while working?
- Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes
20. When you embrace your identity and “come out” to consumers, do you feel more confident?
- Always
 - Usually
 - About half the time
 - Seldom
 - Never

SECTION 4: “Coming out” in your personal life

1. Select all that apply: When you first came “out” (in your personal life) did you...
- Cut your hair shorter
 - Give up traditional beauty rituals (shaving, wearing make-up, dresses and high heels)
 - Start wearing more comfortable clothing
 - Wear something to make yourself identifiable
 - Get a tattoo or piercing
 - Go from dressing for others to dressing for yourself
 - Dress more femme
 - Dress more butch

- Other; If you chose Other, please explain below.
2. Which lesbian gender label best describes the way you see yourself?
 - Butch
 - Soft butch
 - Butch/femme
 - Femme
 - High femme
 - I prefer no label
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other
 3. Which lesbian gender label do others describe you as?
 - Butch
 - Soft Butch
 - Butch/femme
 - Femme
 - High femme
 - I prefer not to say
 - Other; If you chose Other, please explain below.
 4. Please use a numeric answer: How many years have you been “out” to yourself?
 - Less than 6 months
 - Between 6 months and 1 year
 - Between 1 year and 3 years
 - Between 3 years and 5 years
 - Between 5 years and 10 years
 - Between 10 years and 20 years
 - Over 20 years
 5. Please use a numeric answer: How many years have you been “out” to your family?
 - I’m not “out” to my family
 - Less than 6 months
 - Between 6 months and 1 year
 - Between 1 year and 3 years
 - Between 3 years and 5 years
 - Between 5 years and 10 years
 - Between 10 years and 20 years
 - Over 20 years
 6. What best describes you?
 - Fully “out”
 - Somewhat “out”
 - Not “out”

If you answered the question above and want to explain, please use the space below.

7. In your personal life, do you consider yourself identifiable as a lesbian?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes

SECTION 5: Demographics

1. What is your gender identity?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Transgender female
 - Transgender male
 - Genderqueer
 - Non-binary
 - Prefer not to say
 - OtherIf you chose Other, please explain below.
2. How do you identify?
 - Gay
 - Lesbian
 - Bisexual
 - Transgender
 - Queer
 - Intersex
 - Asexual
 - Pansexual
 - Prefer not to answer
 - Other; If you chose Other, please explain below.
3. Do you currently have a spouse, partner, or significant other?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to answerIf you answered the question above and want to explain, please use the space below.
4. How old are you?
 - 18-25 years
 - 26-35 years
 - 36-55 years
 - 56+ years
5. Please specify your ethnicity:
 - White
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Black or African American
 - Native American or American Indian
 - Asian or Pacific Islander
 - Prefer not to answer
 - Other; If you chose Other, please explain below.
6. In which US region do you live?
 - Pacific: AK, CA, HI, OR, WA
 - Mountain: AZ, CO, ID, NM, MT, UT, NV, WY
 - West South Central: AR, LA, OK, TX

- East South Central: AL, KY, MS, TN
 - South Atlantic: DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV, PR
 - West North Central: IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD
 - East North Central: IN, IL, MI, OH, WI
 - Mid-Atlantic: NJ, NY, PA
 - New England: CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT
7. What is your highest level of education?
- High school diploma or GED
 - Associate degree
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Master's degree
 - Doctoral or professional degree

SECTION 6: Interpreter Demographics

1. Which of the following interpreting certifications do you have? Check all that apply.
- NIC
 - CDI
 - CI/ CT (one or both)
 - NAD
 - Ed: K-12
 - SC:L
 - BEI
 - None
 - Other; If you chose Other, please explain below.

2. Did you complete an interpreter training program?
- Yes
 - No

If you answered the question above and want to explain, please use the space below.

3. Do you have Deaf parents?
- Yes
 - No
4. What setting do you work most in?
- Edu: K-12
 - Edu: Post-Secondary
 - VRS
 - VRI
 - Medical
 - Mental Health
 - Legal
 - Freelance/Community
 - Religious
 - Other; If you chose Other, please explain below.

5. How many years of experience do you have as an interpreter? Please use a numeric value.
- Less than 1 year
 - Between 1 year and 5 years

- Between 5 years and 10 years
 - Between 10 years and 20 years
 - Over 20 years
6. How many hours do you average per week interpreting?
- 0-5 hours
 - 6-10 hours
 - 11-15 hours
 - 16-20 hours
 - 21-25 hours
 - 26-30 hours
 - 31+ hours

SECTION 7: Optional

1. You have almost reached the end of this survey. If there is anything else about your experience as an LGBTQ interpreter, please use this opportunity to share.
2. Are you willing to participate in an interview in the future using online video conferencing technology? If so, please click “Yes” below and you will be redirected to a new link to enter your email address to be contacted.
 - Yes
 - No

SECTION 8: Interview Information

Thank you for your willingness to participate in an interview. Please answer the following questions.

1. Do you identify as a lesbian?
 - Yes
 - No
2. How long have you been “out”?
3. Are you comfortable talking about your experiences “coming out” to consumers?
 - Yes
 - No
4. Please enter your email here:

SECTION 9: Survey Complete

Thank you again for completing this survey. Those of you willing to participate in an interview can expect to receive an email from me in the coming weeks. Should you have a question or comments please feel free to contact me at sehrlich18@mail.wou.edu